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Royal Court opens register for condolences

AMMAN (J.T.) — An official announcement Thursday said the Royal Court will maintain a special register book from Saturday, Feb. 13 through Thursday, March 18, for the benefit of the public to offer condolences. Members of the public can sign the book from 10:00 a.m. until 12 noon each day.

King congratulates Assad on reelection as Syrian president

Agencies

HIS MAJESTY King Abdullah on Friday telephoned Syrian President Hafez Assad to congratulate him on his reelection to office for another seven years.

King Abdullah and Assad exchanged views on fields of common concern and discussed bilateral relations and means of enhancing them. The King stressed Jordan's keenness on strengthening ties with Syria in all aspects.

King Abdullah wished Assad health and success in his leadership for the progress and prosperity of the Syrian people.

The Syrian parliament officially named Assad to a fifth seven-year term in office on Thursday after he won 99.98 per cent of the votes cast in Wednesday's referendum.

"The People's Assembly [parliament], after learning the results of the referendum, proclaims Mr. Assad president of the republic," parliamentary president, Abdul Kader Kaddura, said.

Fireworks lit the skies over Damascus as thousands of Syrians celebrated in the streets, which were decorated with large banners reading: "Congratulations, Syria!"

Interior Minister Mohammad Harba told a press conference earlier that 8.96 million Syrians had voted in favour of another mandate for Assad in the referendum in which the 68-year-old president was the sole candidate.

Harba said 219 people had voted "no" to another term for Assad while 917 submitted invalid ballots.

A total of 8,961,147 of the 9,101,155 registered voters cast their ballots, he said. Syria has a population of 17.46 million.

Harba said a total of 766,517 Syrians had voted in Lebanon and Syrian embassies around the world.

"This was a referendum on the 28 years of competent leadership of President Assad," Harba said, pointing to the creation of "democratic institutions" under his rule such as the trade unions and the People's Assembly.

Citing other accomplishments, he said: "Lebanon, following a horrible civil war, had managed to become a united country again thanks to President Assad."

Syria is the main powerbroker in Lebanon and maintains more than 30,000 troops there.

The referendum, which was to have taken place on Monday, was postponed for two days because of the death on Sunday of King Hussein.

Assad was a surprise guest at the state funeral in Amman on Monday of King Hussein.

The Syrian parliament approved Assad as the sole presidential candidate last month, after the ruling Baath party submitted his name to deputies.

Voters were given a voting slip Wednesday asking if they were "in favour of the People's Assembly candidate Hafez Assad for the post of president of the republic."

A "Yes" vote went in a green-coloured circle underneath while a "No" vote went in a grey-coloured circle.

Assad, who was born in northern Syria near the coastal town of Latakia in 1930, took power in November 1970. He was first elected president in February 1971, and relected in 1978, 1985 and 1992.

His current term expires on March 12.

Jordanians pray Friday outside Husseini Mosque in downtown Amman for the soul of King Hussein. The regular Friday noon prayers were dedicated to the late Monarch in solemn ceremonies at mosques across Jordan (AFP photo)

King, Queen, Royal family visit grave of King Hussein

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Abdullah, Her Majesty Queen Noor, the Princes, Princesses and other members of the Royal family on Thursday visited the grave of King Hussein, where they recited verses of the Holy Koran.

The visit to the grave followed the end of the three days of condolence ceremonies conducted separately for men and women mourners from every sector of Jordanian society.

Special prayers were performed Friday in all mosques around the Kingdom for the soul of the late King, who was laid to rest on Monday in the Royal Cemetary.

Preachers urged worshippers to pursue the march commenced by King Hussein in developing the King nation.

King Hussein remembered in Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem

In Saudi Arabia, King Fahd ordered that mosques in Mecca and Medina, the two most sacred cities of Islam, conduct special prayers for the soul of King Hussein.

King Fahd sent a letter to King Abdullah on Wednesday expressing his "deep grief" at losing "a dear brother."

"Saudi Arabia reaffirms its deep-rooted brotherly links with Jordan and prays to God that He may bless King Hussein's soul and help you to serve your country and the Arab and Islamic nations," King Fahd said.

In Jerusalem, special prayers were offered at Al Aqsa Mosque in memory of King Hussein.

Churches to hold special prayers

The Christian communities in Jordan will conduct special prayer services in all churches in the Kingdom on Sunday, and the students of the University of Jordan today will organise a solemn procession in memory of King Hussein.

By Thursday evening, which marked the end of the official mourning period, an estimated two million people had streamed through the Raghadan and Zahran palaces to offer condolences to King Abdullah, Queen Noor and other members of the Royal family.

The thousands of Jordanian men and women who were unable to attend condolence ceremonies at the palaces will be able to sign a book of condolences at the Royal Court.

King Abdullah also received Thursday mourners from Qatar, Palestine and Israel's 12-member parliamentary delegation led by Knesset Speaker Dan Tichon and David Levy, head of the Israeli Gesher Party.

Among the mourners was Faisal Husseini, head of the Jerusalem portfolio for the Palestinian National Authority. Husseini paid tribute to King Hussein, saying he had dedicated his life-long services to Palestine and the Palestinian cause.

Government has not submitted resignation to King — Tarawneh

AMMAN (J.T.) — Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh on Friday said his government has not submitted its resignation to His Majesty King Abdullah but said he will accept the decision of King Abdullah at any time and submit to his wishes.

In an interview aired live on the London-based MBC Friday evening, the premier also said Jordan's relations with Israel will not be at the expense of the Kingdom's relations with Arab countries.

Following are highlights of the inuerview:

Q: What are the policies of King Abdullah?

A: The King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan draws his powers from the Constitution. This is a country in which the King respects the Constitution and protects it. King Abdullah announced in the last few days before the passing of King Hussein that he will follow in the footsteps of his father. King Abdullah, therefore, is going to show determination to continue the policies in order to safeguard and serve his people.

Q: Will King Abdullah follow King Hussein's policies with regard to Israel, and will the relations between Jordan and Syria and Iraq remain strained?

A: Jordan joined the peace process which ended in the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, which was based on the same terms of reference that were accepted by all partners to the peace process. The peace treaty we concluded covered all bilateral issues and did not affect the tracks between Israel and other Arab countries. Our treaty was based on common interest with Israel, but these relations are not built at the expense of the Kingdom's relations with Arab countries. King Hussein has shown great keenness on the issue of the Iraqi people and defended them in the present ordeal and in the face of the embargo. Jordan's trade relations with Iraq have continued and were approved by the U.N. Security Council's sanctions committee. Relations with Syria were warm, especially between Syrian leader Hafez Assad and King Hussein in spite of differences in views concerning the peace process.

Q: Did you tender your resignation to the King?

A: This is not true. It is true I read all the reports on this subject, but would like to assert that Jordan is a country of institutions with a Constitution. The past five days witnessed an application of the Constitution in Jordan in a manner that won the admiration of many countries, including the European nations. The government in Jordan is formed by a Royal Decree, which means that the King appoints the prime minister and the prime minister presents the names of the members of his government to the King for approval. This is a constitutional right of the King, and he has the right to decide on the persons in the government. We do not interfere in the King's rights but rather abide by his orders. I have not submitted my resignation but I am ready at any time to obey any directives from the King.

Q: What is your comment on former Prime Minister Taher Masri's views concerning the future political agenda in Jordan?

A: I agree with Masri's views, which were in fact supported by the late King Hussein and King Abdullah that there should be close interaction among all Jordanian civic institutions. We want everyone to have a part in the decision-making process. The fact that political parties in Jordan are weak is not the responsibility of the government, but it is up to the people to decide on the need for the great number of these parties with different ideologies.

(Continued on page 2)

Bangladesh PM to visit Jordan

DHAKA (AFP) — Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hassina Wajed would visit Jordan "shortly" to pay her respects to the late King Hussein, a minister said here Thursday. "The prime minister will visit Jordan shortly and preparations for her visit are already underway," Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad told reporters at a weekly briefing. He said he could not specify the date immediately as it was being worked out, but said it would take place "definitely this month." One source close to the foreign ministry said Sheikh Hassina was likely to leave Dhaka on Monday.

Israeli delegation pays condolences

TEL AVIV (AFP) — A delegation representing the full spectrum of parties in Israel's parliament travelled to Jordan Thursday to pay a condolence visit to His Majesty King Abdullah and other members of the Royal family, officials said. The parliamentary delegation was headed by Knesset speaker Dan Tichon from Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu's Likud Party and included representatives of all the fractious parliament's factions. Salah Salim of the Judeo-Arab communist party Hadash travelled alongside the leader of the far-right Moledet Party Rehavam Zeevi, whose followers support the expulsion of Arabs from Israel and the occupied territories. Ethiopian deputy Nawef Massalha represented the main opposition Labour Party while other members included the left-wing Meretz Party's Haim Oron and Deputy Housing Minister Meir Porush from the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism Party.

Chechen security forces in shoot-out with armed group

GROZNY (AFP) — One person died and four people were seriously injured late Friday in a shoot-out between security forces and an armed gang in the centre of the Chechen capital. The exchange of fire involved automatic weapons and rocket launchers. The shoot-out between the Chechen national security forces and a group suspected of having links to Islamist movements broke out at 10:30 p.m. (1930 GMT) and lasted five minutes. One motorist was killed by a stray bullet and four other people were seriously injured in the firing. The deputy chief of the national security forces was also reported missing after the fighting.

Algeria to elect president on Apr. 15

ALGIERS (AFP) — Algeria will hold a presidential election on April 15, President Liamine Zeroual announced on Friday in a nationally televised address.

TV cameraman abducted in Beirut

BEIRUT (AFP) — A television cameraman has been kidnapped in southern Beirut following a road traffic accident, press reports said Friday. The reports said that the wife of Mahmoud Jallul, who works for the official Tele-Lebanon station, told police that the car driven by her husband was in collision with a white Mercedes with three unknown people inside. She said he was beaten up and then taken away to an unknown destination. Tele-Lebanon condemned the kidnapping and called for Jallul's immediate release. Trade union groups called emergency meetings for Friday.

FM responds to Arafat's remarks on confederation

By Amy Henderson with agencies

AMMAN — A senior Jordanian official yesterday responded to a statement from Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, who said Friday that he was interested in forming a confederation with Jordan and that the Palestinian leadership was leaving a decision on the issue up to His Majesty King Abdullah.

Foreign Minister Abdul llah Khatib told the Jordan Times that "Jordan's position [on confederation] has been repeatedly stated at all levels."

"We support the Palestinians' legitimate rights, including their right to establish an independent state on their national soil," Khatib said. "When [this happens] all options will be open to discuss different forms of relationships [between Jordan and the Palestinians]."

Yesterday, Yasser Arafat surprised politicians with the announcement that he was interested in forging a confederation between Jordan and a future Palestinian state.

"We want [King Abdullah] to know that the PNC has agreed to a confederation with Jordan, but that is up to [him]," said Arafat during an address to his Fateh movement.

"The Palestine National Council [PNA] approves a confederacy union with Jordan if King Abdullah approves, because we [Jordanians and Palestinians] are twin brothers."

Meanwhile, news agencies quoted Arafat's spokesperson, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, as saying that the Palestinians are prepared for a confederacy with Jordan before or after establishing a Palestinian state.

"If Jordan wants immediate coordination and discussion over [prospects] of creating a confederacy, we're ready," he said.

Palestinians indicated their interest in a confederation with the Kingdom in 1985, although precise terms of the confederation were not laid out by the PNC, the Palestinian parliament in exile. The idea has been met with a lukewarm response in Jordan, with the Kingdom insisting that the Palestinians conclude final status talks with Israel before determining the parameters of a new relationship with the Palestinians, and since then, Arafat has followed that line.

Yesterday, officials said they were not prepared to speculate on Arafat's apparent change of heart.

"We do not know what the motive is," said one official. "We do not know what was intended by this statement."

A political analyst in Amman said he interpreted Arafat's statement as a prelude to postponing a Palestinian declaration of independence on May 4, when the Oslo Accords expire.

"He is trying to postpone a declaration of an independent state, and it is also clear that the Palestinians do not want to be a negative factor in the upcoming [Israeli] elections [on May 17]," the analyst said. "He has found no allies for the declaration in the international framework, so basically, all these statements are in preparation for an announcement that a declaration of independence will be postponed."

Senate acquits Clinton, ending trial

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Senate acquitted William Jefferson Clinton of perjury and obstruction of justice Friday, ending a 13-month drama that catapulted an affair with a White House intern into only the second presidential impeachment trial in history.

Permitted to finish his term, America's 42nd president declared he was "profoundly sorry... for what I said and did."

"This can be and this must be a time of reconciliation and renewal for America," Clinton said in a brief statement from the White House Rose Garden about two hours after the historic verdict.

Chief Justice William Rehnquist pronounced Clinton's acquittal: "It is therefore ordered and adjudged that the said William Jefferson Clinton be and he hereby is acquitted of the charges in the said articles," he intoned.

Senators voted 50-50 on the impeachment article accusing Clinton of obstruction of justice in concealing his affair with Monica Lewinsky, far short of the two-thirds required for conviction. Earlier, senators rejected the charge of perjury by a 55-45 vote, as 10 Republicans joined the Democrats.

"Senators, how say you? Is respondent William Jefferson Clinton guilty or not guilty?" Rehnquist said to a hushed chamber, beginning the vote.

U.S. President Bill Clinton

One by one, senators rose from their seats and declared "guilty" or "not guilty."

Shortly after the votes, Rehnquist banged his gavel to end the five-week trial.

Senators then rejected an effort by Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein, to force a vote Friday on her recommendation to censure the president for "shameful, reckless and indefensible" behaviour. The symbolic effort, which several Democrats said would not be revived later on, was a reminder that, acquittal aside, Clinton remains forever tarnished as only the second president in history to be impeached.

Clinton was in the White House residence during the vote but did not watch it on television. Later he expressed his remorse.

"Now that the Senate has fulfilled its constitutional responsibility, bringing this process to a conclusion, I want to say again to the American people how profoundly sorry I am for what I said and did to trigger these events and the great burden they have imposed on the Congress and the American people," the president read.

The votes were broadcast by the networks to a nation-long since weary of the proceedings. Lewinsky, who testified earlier this month by videotape, watched on television, according to associates.

Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle said Clinton's acquittal should not be seen as vindication for his behaviour. "This was a rebuke. There is no question," Daschle said of the impeachment.

In defeat, the lead House prosecutor said his team had nothing to be ashamed of, rejecting any idea that the Republican impeachment effort — which proceeded despite public opposition — tarnished its credibility.

"All Americans can take great comfort," Rep. Henry Hyde said. "Congress has strengthened, not weakened the ties that bind our nation together."

The Republicans who voted against conviction on perjury were: Slade Gorton of Washington, Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe of Maine, John Chafee of Rhode Island, James Jeffords of Vermont, Richard Shelby of Alabama, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, Ted Stevens of Alaska, Fred Thompson of Tennessee and John Warner of Virginia.

Republican senators opposing the obstruction article were: Collins, Chafee, Jeffords, Snowe and Specter.

Senators on both sides relished the opportunity to end the unpopular trial and get back to legislative business after a mid-February break. "I really think the Senate will be able to work better because of this," Lott said.

Several key Democrats said they do not want the Senate to discuss censuring Clinton after the return from the break.

Bomb threat at Senate

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Police ordered the evacuation Friday of the U.S. Senate after receiving word of a bomb threat, but found no explosive device, officials said. The evacuation order came shortly after the Senate voted to acquit President Bill Clinton on both impeachment charges against him. The entire Senate wing of the U.S. Capitol was evacuated and the threat was investigated. A short time later the order was lifted and the building was reopened.

Sawarka accuses Israel of using him as a guinea pig

CAIRO (AP) — An Egyptian who has just been freed after 22 years in Israeli prisons has accused the authorities of using him as a guinea pig, a human rights group said Thursday.

Mahmoud Al Sawarka, 73, told the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights that while in Israeli custody, he was used a "guinea pig and underwent seven unsuccessful surgeries on his stomach that were performed by medical students."

"I was about to die because of these surgeries and because of the deliberate negligence," the organisation quoted Sawarka as saying.

The Israeli prisons service denied the allegations.

The human rights group said it had interviewed Sawarka in his home in the Mediterranean town of Al Arish.

Sawarka was imprisoned in 1977 after being convicted of killing an Israeli soldier in an ambush he staged in the Sinai Peninsula. At that time, Israel occupied the Sinai, which was subsequently returned to Egypt under the 1979 Camp David peace treaty.

He was released Wednesday from Shikma prison in the southern city of Ashkelon, by which time he had served two-thirds of his sentence and become Egypt's longest-held prisoner in Israel.

In a statement, the rights group said Sawarka was given only bread and a glass of milk every day for his first 12 years in prison. Nor was he allowed to see his wife, Aisha Hijab, and daughter, Samira, during this time.

Sawarka alleged the Israelis tortured him by putting him in a refrigerator and taking him out to pour hot water over him.

He was also "brutally kicked by soldiers," the statement said.

In Israel, Prisons Authority spokeswoman Orit Messer-Harel said Sawarka received "proper medical treatment over the years by the medical staff in the prisons service, and to claim that he was a guinea pig is an arrogant lie."

"The food given to security prisoners in Israeli prisons in general and in Shikma prison, where the prisoner was held, is sufficient, nutritious and varied," Messer-Harel said she could not comment on the torture claims as she did not know where the alleged incidents took place.

An Israeli Defense Force spokesman said he could not comment on the torture charges without knowing the relevant date and place.

STEPPING AT THE BLASPHEMOUS: Muslims take part in a demonstration after Friday prayers in Bombay by trampling over posters of Salman Rushdie, the controversial author of 'The Satanic Verses.' The Indian government has issued Rushdie a visa to return to his home country, which has sparked the ire of Muslim groups who have vowed to 'hound' him relentlessly should Rushdie set foot in India (AFP photo)

Canadian PM apologises for not attending funeral

OTTAWA (R) — Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien apologised repeatedly in parliament on Wednesday for failing to attend the funeral of King Hussein in Jordan, even at one point holding up a small hand-lettered "I'm sorry" poster.

[Jordan's ambassador to Canada, Samir Khalifeh, yesterday told the Jordan Times that the prime minister paid a visit to his residence in Ottawa to pay his condolences].

Chretien, who was on a ski vacation on Canada's west coast when he was notified of King Hussein's death, said there was simply not enough time for his private military jet to reach the Middle East in time for Monday's funeral.

"I am sorry I could not be there ... if there is blame to give, I am here to take the blame. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to go there but I could not make it. I am sorry," Chretien told parliament in response to scathing criticism from opposition politicians and Canada's Arab community.

Newspaper headlines and editorials denounced the absence of Chretien and that of Governor General Romeo LeBlanc at Hussein's high-profile funeral as a national embarrassment.

Outraged politicians and keen reporters have spent the last two days dissecting Chretien's minute-to-minute schedule to determine whether the Prime Minister's office could have devised a better flight path to get him to Amman on time. Chretien was the only leader from the Group of Eight industrialised nations not to attend the event. Canada's chief of defence, General Maurice Baril, held an impromptu news conference on Wednesday to apologise for the military's failure to provide a fast enough aircraft to get Chretien to the funeral.

Israelis and Palestinians held secret talks in 1980s

TEL AVIV (AP) — Israeli and Palestinian officials confirmed Friday that they held secret talks in the 1980s under the direction of Israel's then-Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) chief Yasser Arafat.

The talks were held in various European cities, said Ephraim Sneh, a legislator from the opposition Labour Party, and Hani Hassan, an aide to Arafat and member of the Central Committee of Arafat's Fateh faction. Both participated in the meetings.

The talks were kept secret because Israel at the time did not recognise the PLO and Israeli law made contacts with PLO officials illegal.

Sneh and Hassan gave conflicting accounts of the purpose and duration of the meetings.

Sneh said the talks began in 1988, shortly after the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Labour legislator said Israel's immediate objective was to end the revolt and the long-term goal was to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians. The two sides discussed, among other things, possible Israeli recognition of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation, he said.

He said the talks ended with November 1988 elections that brought a new government to power in Israel.

Hassan said the meetings began in 1986 and broke down over Rabin's efforts to crush the uprising in which Israeli soldiers armed with assault rifles confronted Palestinian stone throwers.

The dialogue "was a big issue with us because it was the first time Israel was sitting with Palestinian representatives," Hassan said. The Palestinians did not inform the Americans about the talks, Hassan said.

Sneh said the talks were hampered greatly by Palestinian hardliners who opposed such meetings.

Then-Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir knew about the talks and did not try to stop them, Sneh said. At the time, Shamir headed a broad-based coalition of his hardline Likud Party and the centre-left Labour Party.

The Israeli-Palestinian autonomy agreements are the result of secret contacts between Israel and the PLO that began in 1993 in Norway.

Government has not submitted resignation to King — Tarawneh

(Continued from page 1)

What is important is national parties emanating from inside Jordan and not steered by orders from abroad. We do not prevent anyone from joining any political party. This is our political pluralism which we advocate. The relations between the executive and the legislative branches are governed by the Constitution. The present government's relations with Parliament are based on mutual respect but it is natural that there is some friction between the two authorities. But these usually are mutually respected and no side encroaches on the rights of the other.

Q: Is the media going to be included in the privatisation programme?

A: Privatisation is a new concept in Jordan and this is not an easy task. There should be enough maturity before embarking on the privatisation process. We have started some privatisation. But other institutions require longer time for privatisation. As far as the media is concerned, the newspapers are owned by the private sector but new regulations and laws have been introduced to organise media performance. There are proposals that the Jordan Television Satellite Channel be managed by the private sector. We are pursuing the process of privatisation and we hope it will be successful in the end.

Q: What is the role of Prince Hassan now?

A: Prince Hassan was the companion of the late King Hussein and served as Crown Prince for 34 years during which he had offered great services to the country, as the late King had said. He never spared any effort towards helping this country. In his letter to King Abdullah, Prince Hassan described himself as a soldier who would never spare any effort in serving this country. He will continue his services as any Jordanian who is able to offer such service.

Q: What is your comment on Abdul Majid Thneibat's remarks and demands concerning corruption, new laws and public freedoms?

A: As a prime minister, I have always had meetings with Thneibat, who has his own ideologies representing certain trends in politics about which we do not see eye-to-eye. I would like to assert to Thneibat that the government's responsibility is to defend this country against any party or nation trying to tamper with its security and dignity. As to the question of laws and corruption, these have not yet been debated by Parliament. We regret that some parties boycotted the 1997 elections for different reasons. These parties should have taken part in the elections so that they could be elected to Parliament, where they can present their views about particular laws rather than debating them outside the framework of Parliament. I believe these laws will be supported by the 80 deputies and the 40 senators and if imbalances appear they will not be overlooked.

Q: How far can Jordan be lenient and tolerant with Israel, which has not honoured its peace treaty with Jordan? I believe our national interest lies with the Arab countries?

A: The peace process resulted in an end of the state of enmity and secured our recovery of Jordanian territories and water resources. The peace treaty was in line with the terms of reference of the Madrid conference, which involved other parties. The peace treaty with Israel was not signed at the expense of Jordan's relations with Arab countries. Yesterday, President Assad was in Amman. borders are open with Syria. But differences of views between the two countries require continued and open dialogue. We hope to have more contacts in the future. Our relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf are excellent. Our relations with Palestinians are strong. Our trade relations with Iraq are progressing and you know there is a huge number of Iraqis in Jordan and our borders with Iraq are open, so we cannot say that our relations with Israel are at the expense of [those with] Arab states.

Q: What do you say about the news that the U.S. Senate acquitted President Bill Clinton?

A: I would like to express our congratulations to U.S. President Bill Clinton. He stood by Jordan and his participation in our sadness is clear.

Q: How will the new King deal with Syria's demands concerning Jordan's normalisation with Israel?

A: Syria is a sister Arab country and a neighbour to Jordan. There are some differences on certain political issues. What is required at the moment is the continuation of dialogue between the two countries.

Q: What is your comment on reported remarks by King Abdullah about Iran, which have reportedly created tension between Jordan and Iran?

A: Eyes are turned on Jordan and sometimes official statements are misinterpreted. Concerning the remarks about Iran, I think there was a clarification presented to the Iranian ambassador in Amman. In addition, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi visited the Jordanian embassy in Tehran to offer condolences. The problems lies with the reading of the statements. In this case, the report did not reflect what exactly King Abdullah meant to say.

Q: What about the developing relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states?

A: We have been overwhelmed by the kindness displayed by the Saudi monarch and senior Saudi officials. Their kind words and visits to offer condolences have touched the heart of every Jordanian. Also, UAE President Sheikh Zayed Ben Sultan Al Nahayan, as usual, took a very honourable stand towards Jordan. And this applies to other Arab leaders. They have all been very kind to Jordan. Jordan will remain strong and steadfast and is committed to all values and principles laid down by the late King Hussein. This is our Hashemite message as we rally behind the King and the Hashemite family.

Hamas leader recalls King Hussein who saved him

By Dominic Evans
Reuters

AMMAN — As world leaders streamed past the coffin of King Hussein at his funeral on Monday, one mourner had particular cause for reflection.

Hamas leader Khaled Misha'al owed the King his life.

Misha'al, largely unnoticed by the world's media amid the host of international dignitaries, slipped quietly through the Throne Room of Raghadan Palace to pay tribute to the Monarch who saved him from assassination by Israel 18 months ago.

"It was a duty," Misha'al, political chief and strategist of the militant Islamist Palestinian group, said on Thursday.

Eighteen months ago Misha'al, whose organisation has killed dozens of Israelis in suicide attacks aimed at derailing its peace accords with Palestinians, was ambushed in Amman in broad daylight by Israeli agents.

Hours later he lay in an Amman hospital dying slowly as his respiratory system collapsed under the effect of a poison sprayed into his ear by his assailants.

King Hussein, enraged that a country he made peace with in 1994 had brazenly sent a hit-squad onto the streets of his capital, stepped in and told Israel the two attackers would hang if it did not hand over an antidote to save Misha'al 's life.

"This is still engraved on my memory, and I appreciate it," Misha'al, 43, told Reuters in an interview. "He took a noble and courageous stance and insisted...the Israelis bring the antidote." King Hussein's tolerance in Jordan of Hamas, opposed to his own peace deal with Israel, was one of the most delicate of his many balancing acts.

Committed to closer ties with the Jewish state, he was still sensitive to influential Islamists who, along with many other Jordanians, saw the treaty as a sellout of Arab aspirations.

In return Hamas pledged not to carry out any acts which would harm Jordan's security and stability.

After the attack Misha'al was treated at one of Amman's top hospitals, the King Hussein Medical Centre, where the Monarch himself died of cancer on Sunday.

When Misha'al recovered, the King invited him to the palace for a "friendly and intimate" meeting. Misha'al recounted in an office in Amman where visitors were meticulously searched by his security guards.

Misha'al said it was "no pleasure" to him that Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu, who ordered his killing, had filed past King Hussein's body on Monday just minutes before he did.

But he insisted he had not met Netanyahu or other Israeli delegates at any stage of the ceremony.

"The presence of someone like Netanyahu, who continues occupation, arrests, terrorist acts against Palestinian people, and who ordered my assassination, gives no pleasure," he said.

"But we attended the funeral to show our respect for, and as our duty to, His Majesty King Hussein. We don't care about the Israeli delegation." Misha'al, warning that Palestinians were entitled to "continue to call for their rights with all legitimate means," said he had spoken to His Majesty King Abdullah at Monday's funeral and foresaw no change in relations under the new Monarch.

King Abdullah was quoted as telling American journalists in his first interview after his elevation to Crown Prince last month that King Hussein's 1994 peace accord with Israel was "the best thing Jordan could have ever done."

"Our relations with Jordan remained good even after the peace treaty," Misha'al replied. "I expect our relations with the new King will remain good, especially since from our side there is no change."

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

PRAYER TIMES

04:59 ..... Fajr
06:17 ..... (Sunrise) Duha
11:50 ..... Dhuhr
14:55 ..... 'Asr
17:23 ..... Maghreb
18:40 ..... 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifieh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811.
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771751.
Amman International Church Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifieh Tel. 5920146
The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331
The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Sunny and moderate weather conditions will prevail. Temperatures will dip slightly and skies partly cloudy. In Aqaba, it will be warm, winds northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Min./Max. temp.

Amman	06/16
Aqaba	12/23
Deserts	04/18
Jordan Valley	13/23

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 18 Aqaba 25. Humidity readings: Amman 38 per cent, Aqaba 31 per cent.

Following are the tempreatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun	04/14
Jerash	06/17
Um Qays	06/17
Madaba	05/15
Petra	05/16
Dead Sea	13/24

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS
NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Khalil Al Tushuq 4757253
Dr. Bahjat Bader 5332642
Dr. Nasser Ibrahim 5350432
Dr. Wafiq Qaddumi 4893542

AMMAN:
Firas Pharmacy 5661912
Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730
Mayadah Pharmacy ... 5537004
Rukn Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID:
Dr. Ghazi Ta'ameh (02)250080
Fou'ad Pharmacy .(02)275360

ZARQA:
Dr. Walid Nabhan (09)3851743
Palestine Pharmacy..(09)983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre..... 4637111
Civil Defence Department .. 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341
Civil Defence Emergency..... 199
Rescue Police 192. 4621111, 4637777
Fire Brigade..... 4617101
Blood Bank..... 4775121
Highway Police..... 5343402
Traffic Police..... 4896390
Public Security Dept..... 4630321
Hotel Complaints..... 5605800
Price Complaints..... 5661176
Water & Sewerage Complaints ... 4897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 0132
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs..... 5661101
Jordan Television 4773111
Radio Jordan 4774111
Water Authority 5680100
J. Electricity Authority .5815615
Electric Power Co.... 4636381
RJ Flight Information..44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport ..44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199
The Islamic, Abdli 5666131/7
Hussein Medical Centre... 5856856
Luzmila 4630195
Khalidi Maternity..... 4644281/6
Akileh Maternity..... 4642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity.... 4642362
Malhas, J. Amman. 4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071
Shmeisani Hospital 5607431
Jordan Hospital 5607550
University Hospital 5353444
Al-Munsher Hospital 5667227/9
Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 4777101/3
Al-Bashir..... 4775111/26
Army, Marka 4891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital..... 5157100
Amal Hospital 5607155
Al Amal Cancer Centre .. 5353000

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital ..... (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital ..... (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital..... (09)986731
Al Hikma Modern Hospital ..... (09)990990

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital ..... (02)275555
Roman Catholic Hospital ..... (02)272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital ..... (02) 7101372, (02) 7103101
Rosary Sisters Hospital ..... (02) 7102831, (02) 7102011
Speciality Hospital .... (02) 7103100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)2014111

FOR THE TRAVELLER
QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport. Tel. (44)53200 where it should always be verified. Information on other flights is obtained on telephone (44) 52700 or (44) 523250. Information on Royal Wings flights can be supplied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
09:25 ..... Damascus, Beirut (RJ)
09:30 ..... Tehran (RJ)
09:55 ..... Karachi, Dubai (RJ)
10:15 ..... Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
11:00 ..... Chicago, Shannon (RJ)
13:40 ..... Colombo (RJ)
13:45 ..... New Delhi (RJ)
15:00 ..... New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
15:30 ..... Linz (add) (RJ)
16:20 ..... Cairo (RJ)
17:40 ..... London, Brussels (RJ)
19:40 ..... Rome (RJ)
21:00 ..... Frankfurt (RJ)
22:50 ..... Larnaca (RJ)
02:00 ..... Paris (RJ)
06:35 ..... Bangkok, Doha (RJ)

Other Flights
13:05 ..... Vienna (OS)
13:15 ..... Riyadh (SV)
13:20 ..... Abu Dhabi, Doha (GF)
14:05 ..... Rome (AZ)
18:00 ..... Dubai, Damascus (EK)
18:40 ..... Beirut (ME)
19:05 ..... Paris (AF)
19:15 ..... Frankfurt (LH)
21:35 ..... Cairo (MS)
22:55 ..... London, Damascus (BA)
23:35 ..... Amsterdam (KL)
01:00 ..... Belgrade (JU)

Royal Wings (RW)
08:30 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
08:50 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
09:35 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
16:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)

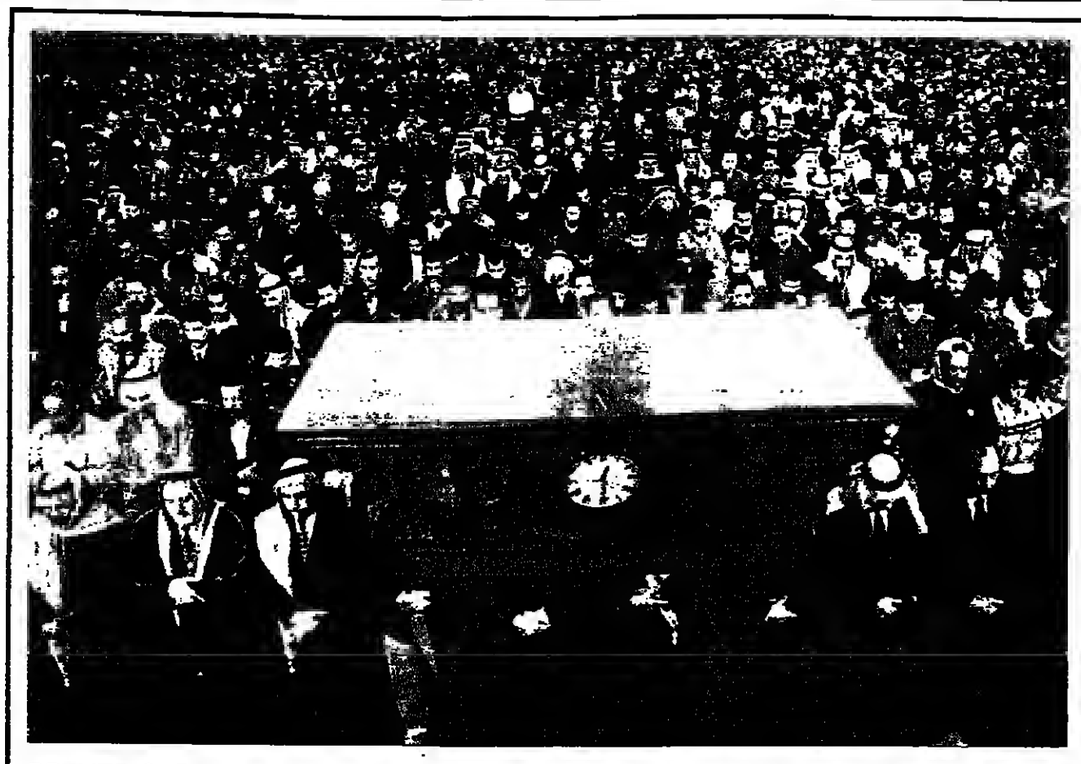
DEPARTURES

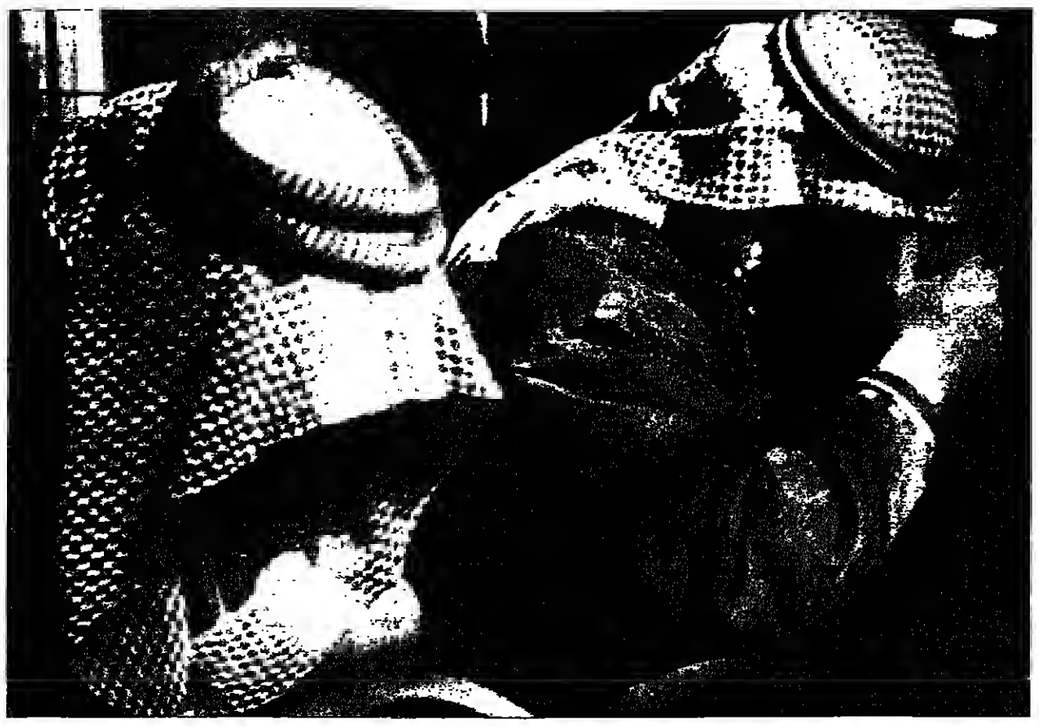
Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:00 ..... Linz (add) (RJ)
11:00 ..... Frankfurt (RJ)
11:15 ..... Rome (RJ)
12:00 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
12:15 ..... London (RJ)
12:30 ..... Cairo (RJ)
14:40 ..... Geneva, Madrid (RJ)
15:35 ..... Paris (RJ)
19:35 ..... Larnaca (RJ)
20:00 ..... Riyadh, Dhahran (RJ)
20:15 ..... Bombay (RJ)
20:30 ..... Jeddah (RJ)
21:00 ..... Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)

Other Flights
06:15 Damascus, London (BA)
06:30 ..... Larnaca (CY)
14:15 Abu Dhabi, Bahrain (GF)
14:45 ..... Riyadh (SV)
15:50 ..... Vienna (OS)
19:00 ..... Dubai (EK)
20:00 ..... Beirut (ME)
22:35 ..... Cairo (MS)
00:35 ..... Amsterdam (KL)
02:10 ..... Belgrade (JU)

Royal Wings (RW)
06:00 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)
08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport)(RW)
19:45 Aqaba (from Marka Airport)(RW)
20:30 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

Kenny Wallace
Speedway as Da
first 125-mile qu





PRAYER SERVICES FOR KING HUSSEIN: **Jordanians around the Kingdom yesterday prayed for His Majesty King Hussein, who died Sunday. Above, men turned out in full force to King Abdullah Mosque in Abdali, while at Al Husseini Mosque downtown, worshippers had to find space outside the mosque during services** (AP photos). **Bottom right, one man prays alone outside the Al Husseini Mosque** (Reuters photo). **Children also turned out en masse with their parents** (AP photo)

Jordanians end week of mourning with special prayer services after two million offer condolences to Royal Family at Raghadan and Zahran Palaces

AMMAN (J.T.) — An estimated two million Jordanians, almost half of the country's 4.6 million people, passed through the palace of Raghadan and Zahran by last Thursday evening to condole the Hashemite Royal Family over the passing last Sunday of His Majesty King Hussein.

Raghadan Palace, opened to men mourners, and Zahran Palace, opened to women, closed their gates Thursday on the third and final day of condolence ceremonies. Mourners came from across Jordan in groups, as individuals, with their children and with their grandparents to mourn the passing of King Hussein who was laid to rest in the Royal Cemetary on Monday following a funeral ceremony attended by Jordanians and Kings, presidents and leaders from around the world who continued to gather on the Royal Palace grounds at both venues to express their sympathy to the Royal Family.

Hundreds of Jordanian men who were unable to see His Majesty King Abdullah on Wednesday because of the crush of tens of thousands of mourners at Raghadan Palace spent the night outside the palace gates to be first in line at sunrise on Thursday.

Meanwhile, thousands of women who were still queueing Wednesday night outside the Zahran Palace where Her Majesty Queen Noor received mourners were turned away when the gates closed at 7:00 p.m.

A book of condolences will be opened at the Royal Court for all those who wish to pay their respects.

King Abdullah and Queen Noor, along with all the Hashemite Princes and Princesses, embraced and shook the hands of hundreds of thousands of ordinary Jordanians since the Raghadan and Zahran palaces opened their doors last Tuesday.

The period of official mourning ended Thursday evening. Government offices and most shops will reopen today.

An extended 40-day period of national mourning will continue until mid-March while the Royal Palaces will mourn for three months from King Hussein's death on February 7.

Around mid-May, an official ceremony of investiture for the new King will be organised, a top Jordanian official told AFP.

"That will allow the anniversary of Abdullah's accession to the Throne to be celebrated oo a different date from the anniversary of his father's death," the official said.

He did not rule out the possibility that Abdullah would also then proclaim his wife, Princess Rania, Queen of Jordan.

Other sources said that Princess Rania will be proclaimed queen in three months, at the end of the Royal Palace's period of mourning.

"The King will issue a Royal Decree at the end of the Palace's three-month mourning period making Princess Rania queen of Jordan," the source said.

The King's wife has for the moment kept the title of princess following Abdullah's ascension to the Throne.

Princess Rania, 28, married King Hussein's eldest son in June 1993. Abdullah was proclaimed King on Suoday after his father died of cancer.

In other news, delegations from Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Arab cities in Israel converged on Amman Thursday to offer condolences to King Abdullah and the Royal Family.

Crossing into Jordan via the King Hussein Bridge, the delegations, including representatives of charitable societies, women groups, municipalities and other insuiuoons, paid tribute to King Hussein for his services and sacrifices for the Palestinian people and their cause.

Hebron Mayor Mustafa Natsheh, who led the delegation, said the Palestinian people have deeply felt the loss of "the great man who speot his life defending the rights of the Palestinian people in their homeland."

He said the delegations came to offer sympathy to the Royal Family and to express solidarity with Jordanians.

Natsheh said the Palestinian people are looking forward to a continuation of the same distinguished relaiionship between the Jordanian and Palestinian people that existed under King Hussein.

Talab Sanee', head of a delegaoon represeoong Arab Israelis who arrived Thursday, said Arabs in Israel highly value the great stands of King Hussein who opened his country to the Palestinians during the Arab-Israeli wars and who hosted the Palestinian refugees in Jordan for the past 50 years.

He said King Hussein also helped the Arab-Israelis to protect their Arab idenoty and their affiliation to the Arab naoon.

A delegation representing the Palestinian labour unions also arrived Thursday. Delegatioo chairman Shaher Saad paid tribute to the King, expressing the Palestinian people's solidarity with their Jordanian brothers.

Zuhrieh Yunis head of an Arab Women's Organisation in oorthern Israel said Arab women of Palestine mourn the King and remember his support of womens groups and his services to the Palestinian cause.

She said the Palestinians are deeply grieved at his loss.

Suleiman Asi, who represented Arab municipal councils in Israel, paid tribute to King Hussein and wished King Abdullah success in pursuing the objectives of his father in the defence of pan-Arab causes.

Local cables of condolence and pledges of allegiance also continued to flow to the Royal Family over the weekend. The Federation of Jordanian Chambers of Commerce Friday sent a cable to His Majesty King Abdullah Ben Al Hussein, expressing sympathy on the passing of King Hussein, and voicing allegiance to the Hashemite Throne.

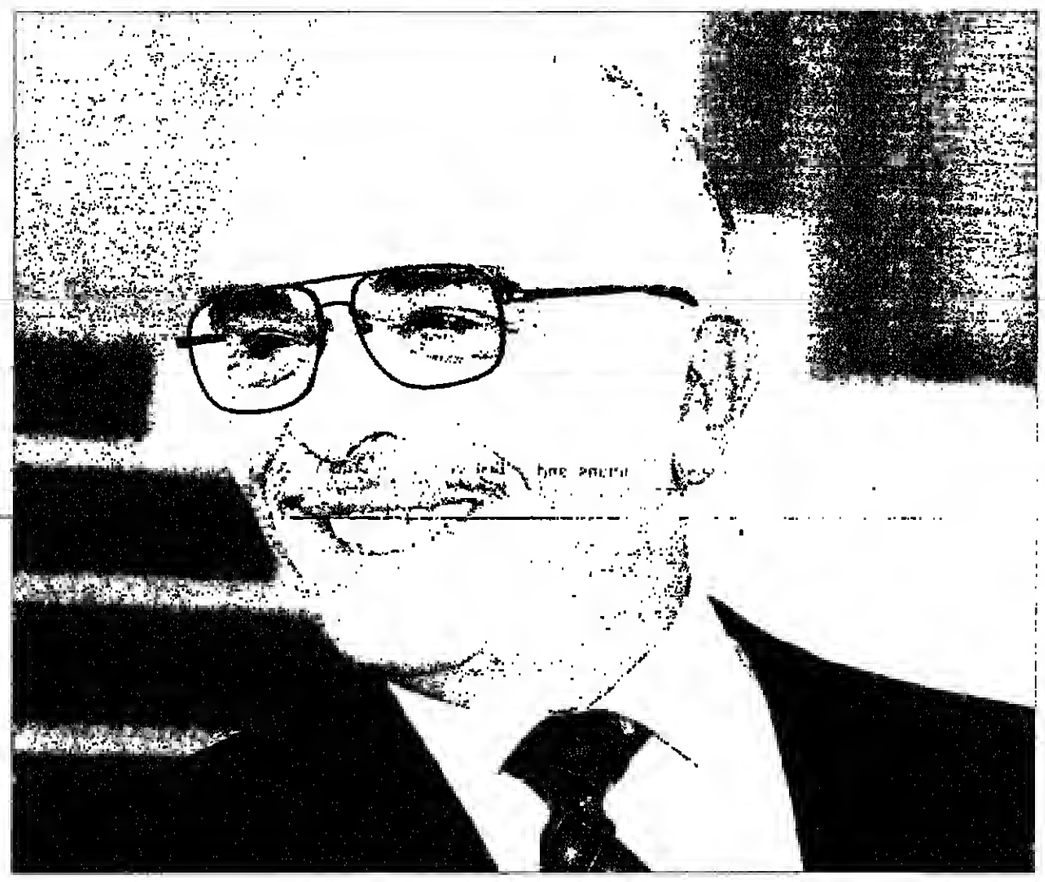
"With the departure of King Hussein, the dean of the Hashemite family, we have lost a great man and one of the greatest world leaders in the 20th century," said Haidar Murad, the federation's chairman who signed the cable on behalf of the federation.

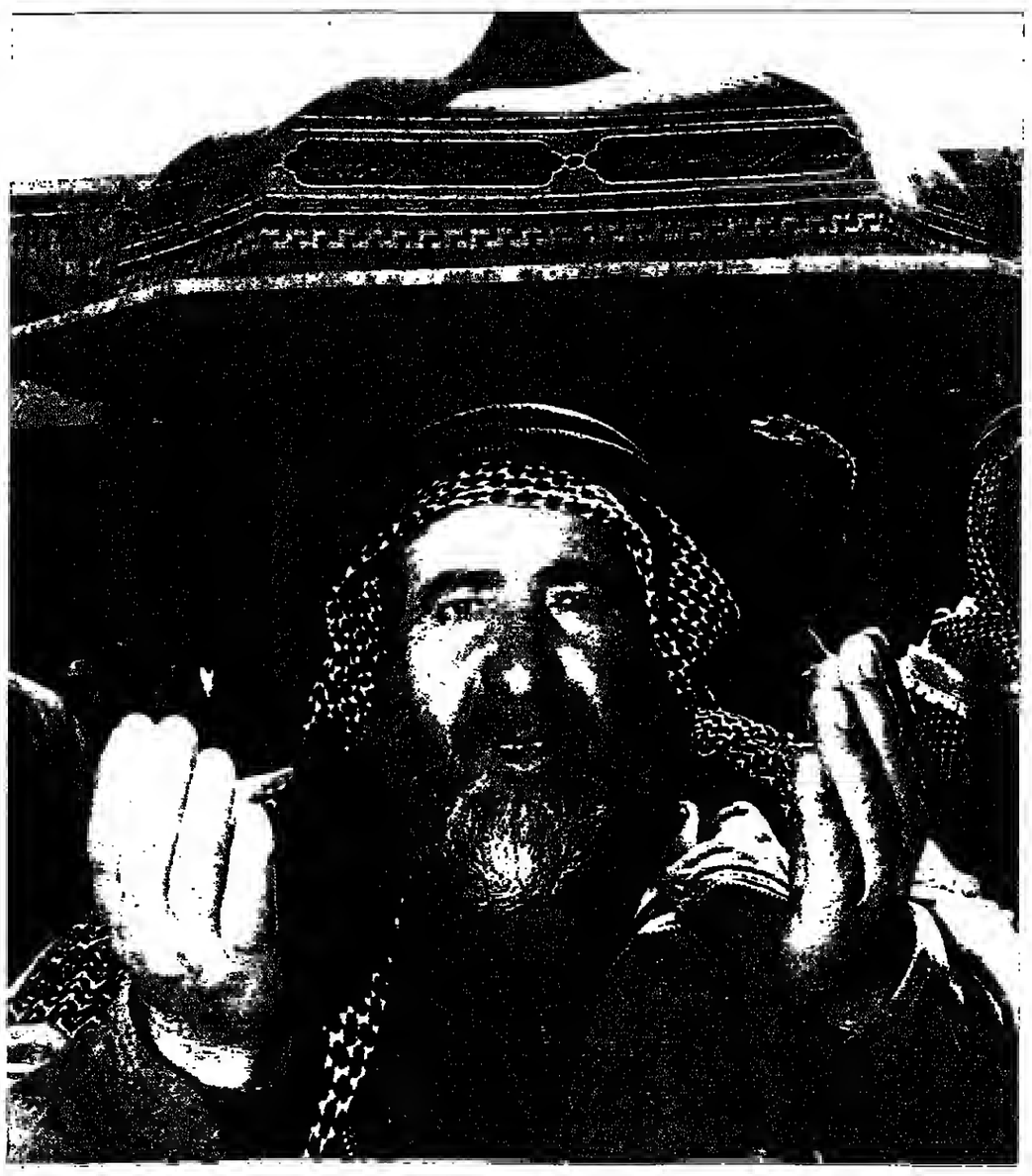
"The King did not leave this world before handing down the standards to his son, another Hashemite leader who will follow in the footsteps of the Hashemite rulers," added Murad.

He said, "The federation, which represents more than 70,000 companies and instituoons in Jordan, pledges allegiance to your leadership and loyalty to the Hashemite Throne and vows to pursue all efforts towards enabling Jordan to conoinue to act as an oasis of security and stability and a haven for all free Arabs."

Murad said the federaoon places its potenoials at the disposal of King Abdullah as a contribuion to the attainment of further progress and prosperity.

He said, "We are determined to honour the pledge to unify our ranks behind the new leader, loyal to the Hashemite Family, and dedicated to fulfilling the oation's objectives regardless of the challenges and the difficuloes it may face."





Pressure mounts for results at Kosovo peace talks

RAMBOUILLET, France (AFP) — Peace talks on Kosovo entered their sixth day Friday amid mounting international pressure for the Serb and ethnic Albanian negotiators to move the deadlocked negotiations forward.

In a bid to push for a breakthrough and show that the international community means business, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was reportedly due to arrive Saturday at the chateau of Rambouillet, where the conclave is being held.

"She's going to roll up her sleeves and try to work the security issues that are the core of the Kosovar's concerns," a White House official was quoted as saying in the International Herald Tribune.

Phil Reeker, spokesman for U.S. Kosovo envoy Christopher Hill, one of three mediators running the talks, could not confirm Albright's arrival.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, co-chairing the parley with his French counterpart Hubert Vedrine, met with the protagonists Thursday and accused Belgrade's delegation of hampering the negotiations, but predicted the talks would be allowed to extend to a second week.

"At the present time, what is holding up the negotiations between the two parties is the current insistence by the Yugoslav side that there should first of all be agreement on the statement of principles," Cook said.

The document contains a pledge to respect the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia.

Cook said he and Vedrine had met at Rambouillet Thursday with Serbian President Milan Milutinovic — a close ally of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic — and underscored that the talks must move forward.

"We conveyed strongly to President Milutinovic that it can't be in the interest of Yugoslavia for it not to make progress," he said.

The six-nation Contact Group on the former Yugoslavia — Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Russia and the United States — has given the warring sides until Saturday to make progress. The Contact Group would then assess whether to grant the two parties another week to finalise an accord.

NATO has threatened airstrikes and sanctions against recalcitrants.

"We've always expected that most of the agreement would be reached in the last 24 hours before the deadline," Cook said.

But U.S. officials said Thursday that Washington is reserving judgement on whether it would agree to prolong the talks for another seven days.

"In the view of the United States, that question remains to be settled, whether indeed we would be in favour of a seven-day extension," spokesman James Foley said.

The Serb and ethnic Albanian negotiators have yet to meet face-to-face — although several reportedly shook hands for the first time late Thursday — or tackle any of the contentious issues dealing with military and security matters.

An Albanian source close to the talks said these issues would likely be addressed next week.

At the heart of the closed-door parley is a Contact Group blueprint that would give Kosovo a high degree of autonomy within the rump-Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) for a three-year interim period.

Overseeing the peace settlement will be an international armed presence of up to 30,000 troops.

Firefighters battle flames at a police station in the Volga city of Samara. At least 25 people died and scores more were injured or missing after one of the deadliest fires in the post-Soviet Russia swept through the police station in Samara. The blaze broke out late Feb. 10 and quickly engulfed the five-story interior ministry building in the central Russian city, sending several people jumping to their deaths and scores more in hospital. Some 230 firefighters spent some 12 hours battling the flames, the worst fire in the city since a 1948 refinery blaze that cost 30 lives, while a 60-strong rescue team combed the gutted building for signs of more victims (AFP photo)

Yeltsin instructs PM to help victims of Samara fire

MOSCOW (AP) — President Boris Yeltsin went to the Kremlin Friday to order that immediate help be given to the families of 29 people killed in a fire that destroyed a regional police headquarters in southern Russia.

"Take immediate measures on the distribution of funding, equipment and material for the liquidation of the effects of the fire," Yeltsin said in a directive to Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov.

Yeltsin also ordered his interior minister, Sergei Stepashin, to coordinate with Russia's general prosecutor to find the reason behind the fire, which completely gutted the six-storey interior ministry building Wednesday night.

Stepashin has suggested that organised crime might have been responsible for the blaze in the city of Samara, and he went to the Volga river city Thursday evening to monitor the investigation.

By Friday morning, the death toll in the fire was 29, with 42 people still missing, the Interfax news agency said. Another 32 were reported injured.

Also Friday, Yeltsin met with Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, and praised his efforts to bring a peaceful settlement to ethnic strife in Yugoslavia's Kosovo district.

Yeltsin's trip to the Kremlin Friday was his fourth in as many days, after weeks spent on the sidelines recovering from a bleeding ulcer. He was hospitalised with the illness on Jan. 17.

But Thursday night, Yeltsin returned to his Gorky-9 residence outside Moscow for the first time since the hospitalisation. He had been recovering at a sanatorium since the end of January.

Yakushkin said Thursday that the president's trips to the Kremlin had been approved by doctors and that Yeltsin's health was improving.

"The recuperation course continues, but the regime has become less rigid. The president has been actively working in the Kremlin," he said, according to the ITAR-TASS news agency.

Meanwhile, a member of Russia's constitutional court said Friday that the body will not consider an impeachment motion to oust Yeltsin until the president is declared healthy.

"There is such a thing as court ethics. This case was filed months ago and now the president is ill. Why should we take this up during his illness?" Justice Nikolai Vitruk said Friday.

The lower house of parliament's impeachment commission was expected to officially announce Friday that Yeltsin is guilty of five impeachable offences, and should be removed from office.

The move to boot Yeltsin from office, launched in February of 1998, is unlikely to succeed because the constitutional and supreme courts, both presidential allies, must approve the document.

International worries over Indonesia's E. Timor U-turn

JAKARTA (AFP) — The speed of Indonesia's change of heart over the future of East Timor, which could now become independent within months, has worried diplomats watching the troubled territory.

Officially several governments have welcomed President B.J. Habibie's statement Thursday that the former Portuguese colony of less than one million people could be independent by Jan. 1.

But U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and diplomats in Jakarta say major obstacles remain before East Timor's future can be decided. Australia is so worried about a new conflict erupting near its shores that Foreign Minister Alexander Downer has sought emergency talks with Habibie.

Indonesia, then under strongarm president Suharto, invaded East Timor in 1975 and annexed it a year later. The United Nations and most countries refused to recognise Jakarta rule, but for more than two decades Suharto kept a firm grip on the province.

Suharto fell from power last year and in less than a month, the Indonesian government has raised the possibility of independence, reestablished tentative diplomatic relations with Portugal and moved East Timor rebel leader Xanana Gusmao out of prison.

Now Habibie says East Timor should be independent by Jan. 1, 2000, so the government can concentrate on its other 26 provinces.

The speed of the U-turn, guided by Habibie, stunned the population of East Timo, the Indonesian government and diplomats in Jakarta — who have officially welcomed the new policy.

The foreign ministry and the powerful army were only consulted at the last minute, according to separate sources. This would explain, the sources said, the lack of coordination between some ministers and their contradictory statements.

The main reason for the change is that Indonesia's economy is on its knees. The government can hardly feed its 206 million people and is only surviving with massive international aid.

Indonesia has also faced international condemnation over human rights abuse and military repression over the past 24 years in East Timor, where most of the population still rejects the Indonesian presence.

According to well-placed sources, Habibie knew when he made his announcement Thursday that when U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright arrived in Jakarta in early March, East Timor would be top of the agenda.

But Indonesia's leaders now seem resigned to giving up East Timor, and some even seem relieved.

Dewi Fortuna Anwar, a foreign policy advisor to Habibie, described the territory that Portugal withdrew from as "a sick appendix which has to be removed."

Foreign Minister Ali Alatas had some blunt words for Jakarta-based ambassadors, according to one participant. "You wanted it, you got it, its all yours now," Alatas was quoted as saying.

Indonesia's sudden change has also complicated the United Nations' search for an accord between Indonesia and Portugal over East Timor.

U.N. chief Annan cautioned, following Habibie's comments, that "major hurdles" remained ahead of a political settlement.

Annan noted that just-ended talks here between Portugal and Indonesia focusing on draft U.N. autonomy proposals had "gone very well, and have made some progress."

But "we still have some major hurdles ahead. It will require major efforts by the international community either way," he added.

One Western diplomat in Jakarta said Habibie's announcement had come "out of the blue" and added: "We have got to review everything now."

"What we need now is a solid process that can be protected against any other change of policy in Jakarta, such as a new government or a nationalist backlash," said the diplomat.

Foreign governments are also concerned that the small territory could descend into chaos and conflict between separatists and those who want East Timor to remain Indonesia's 27th province.

Scientists endorse suppressed research on gene engineering risks

LONDON (AFP) — Twenty scientists from 13 countries Friday endorsed the suppressed findings of a researcher in Scotland whose experiments suggesting risks from genetically engineered food led to his dismissal.

The scientists insisted that Professor Arpad Pusztai of the Rowett Institute in Aberdeen be allowed to return to work. He was suspended in August after proving that rats fed with genetically engineered potatoes experienced organ changes.

"We found that his data is sound. We think it would pass peer review and be published and we are at a loss to really explain why the Rowett Institute came to the conclusion it did," Vyvyan Howard, a toxipathologist from Liverpool University, told the BBC.

Pusztai, whose research was financed by the Scottish Office, found that the rats who ate the potatoes experienced weakened immunity systems and changes in their kidneys, thymus glands, intestines and spleen.

Food groups "will have to do rigorous hazard assessment and do it repeatedly," Howard said.

"One key problem that keeps coming back time and time again is that regulation on foods is nothing like as strict as the regulation for drugs," Professor Jonathan Rhodes told the Guardian.

"And when you start tinkering around with the genetic structure of food, you have to move towards thinking of food products as pharmaceutical," he said.

Pusztai was urged to retire after revealing some of his results on television. His employer said he had given "misleading information".

The British minister in charge of policy on genetically modified foods, Jack Cunningham, said any new elements would be examined "thoroughly and quickly".

But he rejected calls for a three-year ban on the commercial release of genetically engineered crops until more research is done.

"A moratorium on the experimental work is neither necessary nor sensible in the circumstance. If we stopped testing what is proposed, we would bring the whole thing grounding to a halt," the minister told the BBC.

In a measure of the pressure on the government, even its own advisory body on environmental issues has advised it to impose a three-year moratorium on those crops genetically modified to be resistant to herbicides.

British, Spanish FMs to meet soon over Gibraltar

MADRID (AFP) — British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and his Spanish counterpart Abel Matutes will meet in Brussels on Feb. 21 in a bid to defuse a blazing row over Gibraltar, diplomatic sources said Friday.

In a 90-minute telephone conversation Thursday evening, Cook and Matutes agreed to "calm tensions" and "not take any new measures", the sources said.

They decided to "keep all channels of dialogue open."

Spain does not recognise the Gibraltar government or British authority over the territory, which has been a crown colony since 1713.

A row over fishing rights that has been simmering since the early 1990s has now led to a large-scale diplomatic dispute.

Spain has threatened a series of sanctions against Britain to press its claim for sovereignty.

Britain has formally protested to Madrid and said it would ask the European Union's executive to intervene after Spain threatened to bar drivers with driving licences issued in Gibraltar and ban flights to and from Gibraltar that cross its airspace.

Some British MPs demanded the government send a gunboat to show its resolve, while Spain's junior foreign minister, Ramon de Miguel, said Thursday the dispute was now at a "watershed."

Spain seized Gibraltar, a headland colony and strategic port on the southern tip of the Iberian Peninsula, from the Moors in the 15th Century, but Britain captured it in 1704. Sovereignty has been disputed since.

In 1967, 99 per cent of Gibraltar's 28,000 residents voted to remain under British rule. In 1969, Spanish dictator General Franco closed the border between Spain and Gibraltar, and it did not reopen until 1985.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Taleban, opposition refute reports of ceasefire

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) — Afghanistan's Taleban religious army said there is no ceasefire with the opposition, who claimed Friday to have launched a massive offensive in northern Faryab province. Neither side in Afghanistan's protracted civil war said they agreed to stop fighting, refuting claims out of Turkmenistan where representatives of the feuding sides met Thursday. According to a report from Russia's Interfax news agency, delegates from the Taleban and the opposition signed an agreement in Turkmenistan to exchange prisoners and declare a ceasefire in Afghanistan. But both the Taleban and opposition disagreed. "We have no trust in the opposition," said Wakil Ahmed Mutawakil, a spokesman for the Taleban who was contacted at his headquarters in Afghanistan's southern Kandahar province. And an opposition spokesman, who was contacted in the Panjshir Valley, about 150 kilometres north of Kabul, said opposition fighters launched a major attack on Maimana, the capital of northern Faryab province. The spokesman, who wouldn't give his name, said there was fighting inside the capital. The Taleban denied the claim. "The opposition keeps making these claims to boost the moral of their fighters but it's not true," said Mutawakil. "Maimana is with the Taleban and they are in firm control." In New York, a spokesman for the United Nations Fred Eckhard said: "We are pleased to confirm ... that indeed some progress was tentatively made on various important issues." However Mutawakil said a cease fire was not among the items that was discussed. "We did not talk about not fighting," he said. The Taleban, which rules about 90 per cent of Afghanistan are fighting their opponents on several fronts, all in northern Afghanistan. The only strong opposition remaining is being waged by Afghanistan's former defence minister Ahmed Shah Massood.

Hong Kong takes no action against officials over new airport fiasco

HONG KONG (AFP) — Hong Kong has decided not to take action against two leading officials blamed in the chaotic opening of Hong Kong's new international airport, the Airport Authority's Board working group said Friday. Maria Tam, chairwoman of the board, said in a statement the board has decided not to seek recovery of gratuities paid to Henry Townsend and Douglas Oakervee, former executives of the Airport Authority. But the board has decided not to renew contract of Chem Heed, currently director of Airport Management, and will immediately terminate the contract of Kiron Chatterjee another senior airport official. The recommendations were made after completion of the three inquiries into the events surrounding the opening of the airport last year. An earlier inquiry by legislators severely criticised the government, including Chief Secretary for the Administration Anson Chan, while a report by the government-appointed Commission of Inquiry cleared officials of blame. The new showcase airport was hit by a series of problems on its opening day, ranging from lengthy delays to lost luggage, poor flight information, filthy toilets and security lapses. But the worst problems were on the cargo handling side where a complete systems breakdown forced the suspension of air cargo operations. The cargo problems are estimated to have wiped off around 0.35 per cent from Hong Kong's already battered gross domestic product.

2 policemen kidnapped in Kosovo

PRISTINA, Serbia (R) — Two off-duty Serb policemen have been kidnapped by suspected ethnic Albanian guerrillas in Kosovo, international monitors said Friday. Confirming a report by the Serb-run Media Centre in Pristina, sources in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) said the two were last seen in the town of Kosovo Polje just outside the provincial capital Tuesday afternoon. The monitors said that the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) had denied any involvement. The Serb-run Media Centre said the two, wearing civilian clothes and driving a civilian car, were stopped by three cars belonging to the KLA in Vucitrn, northwest of Pristina, and driven away. Ceasefire monitors of the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) had been informed and a search for the missing officers had been launched, it added. Last month the KLA seized eight Yugoslav soldiers and demanded the release of nine guerrillas seized after a border clash in December which left 36 rebels dead. Both groups of detainees, and five elderly Serbs kidnapped by the KLA in what appeared to be an unrelated incident, were released under a deal brokered by the OSCE.

Frenchman on respirator dies when power cut off

PARIS (R) — An elderly Frenchman who could only breathe with the help of a respirator died when the electric company cut off power to his home after he failed to pay his bills, the company acknowledged Friday. The local electricity firm in the southeastern town of Nice said Friday it had been totally unaware of the man's precarious health when it cut off power after the non-payment of 1,000 francs ($200). "Everyone here is shocked, this runs totally against the grain of what we try to do in such cases," said Philippe Lenoir, director at Electricite de France in Nice.

Japanese butterfly hunter fined by Sri Lanka court

COLOMBO (R) — A Sri Lankan court Friday fined a Japanese man 60,000 rupees ($867) for hunting butterflies without a permit in a southern forest, court officials said. Wildlife officials on Jan. 31 found Teruo Hasegawa, of Chiba, with 32 dead butterflies in the Sinharaja Forest Reserve, some 100 km southeast of the capital Colombo. A local magistrate remanded Hasegawa into custody until Feb. 12 and called for a Zoological Department report on the butterflies to determine if they were rare or endangered species. Some of the species were found to be endangered, the officials said without giving details. Hasegawa was not able to pay the fine Friday and the magistrate gave him time until Monday. He was to be held in jail until then, the officials said. The magistrate also warned Hasegawa he would face six years in jail if found to commit a similar offence in Sri Lanka within the next 10 years, they added. Wildlife officials said Hasegawa had identified himself as a collector but did not have a permit to catch butterflies. The killing and export of rare species is punishable in Sri Lanka by a minimum fine of 30,000 rupees ($435) and between two and six years' jail, officials said.

Japan's oldest person dies at 113

TOKYO (R) — Japan's oldest person died Friday at the age of 113, Japanese media reported. Yasu Akino died from old age at her grandson's home in Shizuoka Prefecture, 140 km southwest of Tokyo, Kyodo news agency said. With Akino's death, 112-year-old Denzo Ishizaki becomes the oldest living Japanese, Kyodo said. Akino, born in 1885, married at the age of 20 and raised one son and three daughters. She had been mostly bedridden after fracturing her left leg trying to get out of bed five years ago.

Jordan Times

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New start

THE NEW mandate that Syrian President Hafez Assad won for a fifth seven-year term in office and the recent pronouncements by Israeli leaders that they wanted to pursue peace with Damascus, should enhance stability in the Middle East and lay the firm foundation for the renewed peace talks between the two countries. The overwhelming support that the Syrian president won from his people in Wednesday's referendum is certainly a good omen for the entire region and especially on the peace process front. President Assad's participation in the funeral of His Majesty King Hussein and private talks with His Majesty King Abdullah has given fresh hopes for positive and improved bilateral relations between the two neighbouring Arab countries. King Abdullah, was of course, among the first leaders to congratulate President Assad.

These developments augur well for peace and security in the region. Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu vowed upon his return from King Hussein's' funeral to strike peace with Syria before the year 2000. Whether Netanyahu's pledge was just an election gimmick or not, we hope that Israel will seek peace with the rest of the Arab countries especially Syria and Lebanon. During the King's funeral, the Israeli leader expressed a desire for a new beginning in the peace process. The dawn of peace, stability and progress could indeed be around the corner if the Israeli side is sincere in its recent pronouncements and not just politicking on the eve of the May elections.

Jordan, meanwhile, seeks brotherly relations with Syria and finds in President Assad an excellent partner for waging this goal. It is unfortunate that the Syrian-Jordanian relations in the past had fluctuated very much. It has often been suggested that Arab relations should be institutionalised and made free of fluctuations that are harmful to their national interests. Good relations between Damascus and Amman would certainly lend valuable support to the quest for a just and comprehensive peace in the entire region. With Damascus now benefiting from a renewed mandate for its able leader, the road ahead could be just right for Syria, Jordan and the rest of the Middle East to pursue peace with vigour.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Fanek commented on the last minute decision by Syrian President Hafez Assad to attend and participate in His Majesty King Hussein's funeral. At the same time Assad held talks with His Majesty King Abdullah and Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh, and this means that a new stage of joint relations is about to begin, said Fanek. In order to avoid talk of normalisation, Syrian officials announced that the country would not participate in the procession if Israel attended, but although four Israeli delegations took part in the ceremony, Syria suddenly changed its position and Assad decided to come. A CNN correspondent, who visited Jordan for the first time and does not know anything about it, claimed, according to the writer, that Assad's attitude towards Jordan's leaders was ambiguous. But in fact, said Fanek, Jordan appreciated and was grateful for Assad's attendance and compassionate condolence to King Hussein's sons, as it was a sign that the cold relations between the two countries, which arose over their differences over the peace treaty, can be overcome. Assad's attendance was a sincere message of willingness to renew respect between the two countries, added Fanek, thanking both Syria and Assad for this gesture.

Al Dustour's Yasser Za'atreh said His Majesty King Abdullah provided what could be an indication of the next stage in Jordan's political direction. King Abdullah told Al Hayat newspaper that the next stage will witness "more support for the democratic march, political pluralism, freedom of expression and civil society's institutions." Translating these words into practical reality requires brave decisions and deliberation between the Kingdom's political powers and civil society's institutions, said Za'atreh, to come up with the best formula to support the democratic march. Making decisions without discussing them with the country's vital powers, said the writer, will not gather comprehensive support for the march. If the election law is the essence of the democratic process, then the government should not be the only party to decide its formula, argued Za'atreh. Similarly, this should apply to the Press and Publications Law and other laws, said the writer, who added that strengthening the national unity must not be implemented without consulting the citizens.

The challenges ahead

Jordanian Perspective

Dr. Musa Keilani

SO MUCH has been said about our beloved late King Hussein that there is little anyone could add in tribute to a Monarch who was a member of the household of everyone of his subjects, as he was at home at any regional or international forum interacting with world leaders. The unprecedented level of Arab and international representation at the funeral of the King speaks volumes for the love and respect he commanded throughout the world, prompting many a commentator to describe the event as the funeral of the century.

It will be no exaggeration to say that there has never been a head of state like King Hussein in modern history, and it is unlikely that the world would ever again see such a unique human being with compassion, love, vision, wisdom, statesmanship and diplomacy as well as intimacy with his people.

He will be greatly missed not only by us Jordanians but also by everyone who came to know him. The flow of tributes that we see in the pages of this newspaper and others in Jordan and elsewhere are only a small glimpse of the love, respect and popularity the King commanded.

His Majesty King Abdullah has inherited a heavy mantle from his father. He faces the difficult task of living up to people's expectations that he will be another King Hussein, and if anything, the years that King Abdullah spent in close quarters with his father should be a source of knowledge and familiarity with the way King Hussein conducted his reign and took difficult decisions.

Another plus, of course, is the vast resource of political strength that Jordanian politicians, former prime ministers, Royal Court officials and others have acquired during the turbulent years that Jordan lived through and survived in the nearly five decades of King Hussein's reign.

As such, King Abdullah has several sources of political acumen and advice to draw from— a far cry from the days when his father took power.

Today, political life in Jordan is institutionalised, and the guidelines have been firmly set for governance.

Indeed, it will be naive to expect King Abdullah to step in immediately and become the mediator and mentor in the Middle East region as his father used to he. Quite simply, the influence and persuasive powers that King Hussein bad were acquired over the decades be spent at the helm of affairs. It was like, as the adage goes, learning French in France rather than at home. So, in realistic terms, King Abdullah has to actually go through the paces and gain direct experience before he can act the way his father did on numerous occasions. The way King Hussein handled the deadlocked Hebron negotiations in 1996 and the Wye River meetings in 1998 are classic examples.

Improving relations with Jordan's neighbours to the extent that they no longer pose a threat to the stability and security of the Kingdom is a daunting task confronting King Abdullah. It is a path full of pitfalls, whether in terms of trying to achieve a better balance in ties with Iraq and Syria as well as the Arabs in general on the one hand, and Israel, and indeed the U.S., on the other.

The requirements of maintaining and nurturing the state of peace with Israel are in direct contrast with what some Arabs expect Jordan to undertake in the post-Hussein era. Striking a delicate balance between those requirements and expectations is a tough task, but we are encouraged that the baselines were clearly drawn by King Hussein for his successor to maintain and strengthen.

We'd like to take the unexpected presence of Syrian President Hafez Al Assad at King Hussein's funeral as a sign of unreserved goodwill and recognition of the strength of ties the two leaders enjoyed in 78-79 (when one could bandover the passport to the Jordanian officer at the Ramtha border post and take it back in a few minutes from the Syrian officer next to him before driving on to Damascus or vice-versa).

Comments in the Syrian press after the King's funeral bave comforted us, but we hope Damascus would not bring to bear upon us pressure to adopt actions that are contrary to the spirit of the modus vivendi that King Hussein bad forged. We all know that the main problem between Syria and Jordan in the peace process was the Syrian attempt to dominate the negotiations with its Golan agenda by brushing aside the Jordanian and Palestinian aspects of the process.

From the east, we hope Saddam Hussein would not expect Jordan to commit political suicide by throwing its lot in with Iraq.

Similarly, the Americans should not demand Jordan become a partner in the U.S. effort to topple Saddam Hussein through whatever means.

It is equally understood that Jordan will maintain the same good relations with Israel, which has always been a priority in King Hussein's agenda. But the recent request to reopen the Mossad office in Amman will be judged by Israel's performance during the next two months. That office was shut following the assassination attempt on Khalid Misba'al, a loyal Jordanian, heading Hamas' political bureau.

The Arab Gulf leaders have clearly rallied behind King Abdullah. The UAE is transferring deposits to the Central Bank of Jordan to avert any speculation on the Jordanian currency and Saudi Arabia has agreed to resume aid to the Kingdom among other Arab moves to support King Abdullah.

The personal relations that King Abdullah has been maintaining with the young and forward-looking emirs and princes of the Gulf are indeed a great asset for the new Monarch, who also faces the tough mission of putting the Jordanian house in order and thus fulfil his father's promise of sweeping reforms in the country.

We are confident that he has the clarity of vision, brevity of words and expanse of action that are crucial to the success of any reform. Indeed, while the era of Hussein has ended to make room for Abdullah, we are highly optimistic of positive continuity of the successful Jordanian approach.

Columnists share in grief

Reviewed by Mohammad Ben Hussein

Columnists last week expressed their grief over the loss of King Hussein and called on Jordanians to resume their normal lives after the period of mourning and continue the journey which King Hussein started.

Al Rai's Fahed Fanek called on Jordanians to regain their composure after the near state of hysteria over losing King Hussein and resume their lives with hope for a better future. King Hussein's economic and political achievements were for Jordan and its people, said the writer, and the memory of the King will be the incentive for all Jordanians to work harder to honour their leader even after his death. Jordanians will prove that they deserved such a great leader who won the world's admiration, said the writer. After the King's death, the whole world will monitor Jordan's policies especially after King Abdullah's assurance that he will continue the same path as that of his father, but, added Fanek, Jordanians have to maintain the spirit they had when the King was alive. Jordan lost King Hussein but his blood still runs in King Abdullah's veins. King Hussein will never be forgotten by the people who lived at his time, while the next generations will remember him as a hero who built a modern and democratic Jordan, said Fanek. The whole world remembers King Hussein as a man of peace who took the hardest decisions in very delicate times achieving peace and security for his country as well as regaining his lost rights, said Fanek. The King always supported the Palestinians by championing their cause. The most important heritage of King Hussein is the continuity which he made for his sons by following his steps and continue building the country using the same guidelines, said Fanek. King Abdullah I gave Jordan its independence, King Talal gave Jordan the Constitution and King Hussein gave birth to a new and democratic Jordan, said Fanek. And now there is King Abdullah starting a new march which Jordanians will accompany and support to overcome all the difficulties that might face the country.

Al Dustour's Oreib Rintawi hailed Arab satellite channels for their coverage of King Hussein's death, saying those channels stood by the Jordanians when Jordanian television was almost paralysed, and they acted as if they were Jordan's own. The MBC channel broadcasted news about Jordan as if it was Jordanian, the Lebanon-based "Future" halted its normal broadcasting and started sending verses from the Holy Koran as well as documentaries about Jordan, the LBC channel also stopped its normal programmes and placed King Hussein's picture on its screen. The most popular channel, "Al Jazirah," was the biggest distributor of news reports and documentaries about Jordan and mostly by Jordanian speakers. The other Arab channels were also showing solidarity with the Jordanian people by linking their broadcasts with Jordanian television. Others broadcasted their programmes in black and white to show their grief about the loss of the King, said the writer. What the Arab channels did for Jordan and its people should be a lesson for Jordanian officials to continue the policy of openness to the rest of the world. King Hussein earlier called for removing all restrictions against the press locally and internationally, even if the media criticises Jordan. The writer warned against any kind of war with the Arab media because the result of the battle is known before it starts: Jordan will lose.

Al Arab Al Yawm's editorial commented on the international support Jordan and its new leadership received at the historic funeral of King Hussein. The very high level delegations which came to Jordan to express their grief over the loss of King Hussein can be considered an indication of a new era for Jordan on the Arab and international arenas, said the Arabic daily adding that the sad event has paved the way for a restoration of full diplomatic ties with some Arab countries after years of tension and strained relations. King Hussein's dream was that all Arab countries maintained warm relations and would resolve all differences which might occur among them. There is a good chance to turn a new page in Jordan's relations with its neighbours as well as balancing its relations with certain countries by controlling and rationalising the enthusiasm in relations between Jordan and Israel, which was very high even when Israeli measures were a major stumbling block for the peace process, said the paper. It is true that the international support Jordan has received after the death of King Hussein makes people optimistic about the future of Jordan, but this optimism becomes legitimate only if the new leadership begins with its top priorities and start the necessary reforms while providing the political means for better action. While the Jordanian nation is mourning over their life-long companion, they are full of hope that the coming days will bring a better life to them and their children. Despite all the achievements Jordan have accomplished, the road is still too long and many things are yet to be done, said Al Arab Al Yawm.

The bigger they come, the harder they fall

Out of Order

Brian Brown

IT HAS come to be seen as a classic case of the once-mighty being humbled. The Soviet Union was large, strong and menacing for 75 years. But the Bear became weak, worn out by advanced age, constant struggle and the problems that are inherent in all such bears. In the end, he broke down, liberalised his economy and society, and joined the international community of animals. The process of humbling former rivals, however, is a delicate one, and if certain accusations are to be believed, the Bear, now known as Russia, is being asked to accept far more than just being brought down a notch by his newly-found friends.

A certain Western country, according to a Russian official, is pressuring Moscow to alter its foreign policy in exchange for desperately-needed cash to combat the effects of a shattered economy. This country, which was described as "not European and not Asian," also reportedly added the threat of a domestic media campaign against the Russian government if these changes were not forthcoming. In other words, this unnamed Western country is attempting to blackmail Russia in a particularly strong-armed matter.

Now, I'm not that interested in speculating as to the identity of this Western country, since the description "not European and not Asian" still leaves a lot of room, depending on how one interprets it; Canada, Australia, the U.K., and even Mexico, along with a number of smaller contenders such as Iceland, could all fit into this category. Rather, my interest lies in examining a few of the possible implications and results of such an odious employment of international blackmail, if these accusations prove true. In order to avoid offending any countries that I may have contact with in the future, I shall refer to this Western country as the Unnamed State, or U.S. for short.

The U.S.' foreign policy with regard to Russia, and many other nations for that matter, is somewhat puzzling. On the one hand, Russia is still acknowledged as globally important for a number of reasons, even though it is a shadow of its former self. It has abundant natural resources, occupies a strategic geographical position, and historically has played an important international role. More importantly, for reasons relating to the survival of humans and most other forms of life, it maintains control over the world's largest stockpile of nuclear weapons. On the other, Russia is now effectively being cut off from the means to rebuild and develop its infrastructure. And the means to pay the people guarding the world's largest nuclear stockpile. In addition, it is increasingly being ignored on the world's political stage in areas that it traditionally held a large stake in, such as the Middle East and the Balkans.

It is not difficult to see what path Russia might decide to take when faced with such a situation. It is still in a position to assume an aggressive, ultra-nationalist posture and return to a Soviet-style system of government, something that the U.S. and many other countries ostensibly do not want. Fortunately, with people like "Mad" Vlad Zhiranovsky leading the ultra-nationalist camp in Russia, such an outcome does not seem likely. But even if that outcome, a reprise of the Soviet Union, can be ruled out, an answer to the problems plaguing Russia has still not been offered. In this respect, it is ironic that Ronald Reagan's policy of spending the USSR into bankruptcy was seriously accepted and carried out, yet now that the "Evil Empire" has fallen both policy and money are not to be found.

And now, with all of these troubles, the U.S. steps in and threatens to play a more active role in Russia's internal affairs. Such a claim is hardly unbelievable; there have been many such instances of a U.S. having a major say in other states' policies. This latest episode, however, goes far beyond any other historical example. In the past, the USSR was the only party that could prevent the Unnamed State from overstepping its bounds; it kept the other empire (somewhat) honest. But those days are gone. The world will have to rely more and more on the judgements and values of one unnamed country, unless an inheritor to the "Evil Empire" (I propose the EU, which is henceforth to be known as the "Morally-Ambiguous Empire") can be found. In the meantime, the future of Russia remains in limbo. The old rival is down. The question is, does he get a helping hand or a kick in the teeth?

***RECOMMENDED READING:** Crime and Punishment, by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. An appropriate description of Russia's current situation. Raskalnikov, a starving student, convinces himself that he belongs to o superior class of humanity, and as often happens to persons subscribing to such views, he kills someone he considers inferior. However, he begins to regret the murder, and interprets everything that happens around him in terms of his crime. Although extremely slow and dense reading at times, Crime and Punishment remains one of the best studies of the guilty mind.*

The King's junior advisor

By Waleed Sadi

PRACTICALLY EVERY Jordanian has some anecdote they can relate about His Majesty King Hussein. ... The late Monarch was so close to his people that most of us have had some kind of encounter with him that will always stand out in our memories.

Fresh out of the University of Chicago and 'too Americanised and direct' for my own good, I used my post at the Royal Palace as assistant to the Chief of Protocol as a platform to speak on issues that I knew something about, and about subjects that I knew very little about. On one occasion, I walked in to His Majesty's office after the completion of the daily Royal audiences to announce that I had something to tell His Majesty. For a while the King looked surprised to see a junior member of the Royal Palace wanting to express an opinion on anything, much less on a very complex foreign policy issue. King Hussein asked me to sit down to hear me out. I was a bit nervous and pleaded to stay standing. I then proceeded to say: "Your Majesty, your policy on ... is totally wrong." His Majesty looked at me with his usual smile and said: "Since I am wrong, would you please sit down and tell me why I am wrong?" I proceded to explain my reasons. His Majesty answered that the issue was a bit more complex than that. Then he went on to say: "Please brother Waleed, do not hesitate to tell me when you think I am wrong!"

Now, tell me where in the Middle East or even in the heart of the Western world can a junior official bluntly tell the head of state that he is wrong and get away with it? But King Hussein was a different kind of leader. He was a unique phenomenon who will forever remain special and magnificent.

The writer is on the staff at the Jordan Times

Letters of condolence

AS AN American, who lived in Amman from 1980 to 1992, I want to express my deepest sympathy to the Royal Family and all my wonderful friends and family in Jordan and all of the people there. I was fortunate to have been a teacher at the Amman Baccalaurate School for almost 12 years and to have taught Crown Prince Hamzah, Prince Ali, Prince Rashid, Prince Hasbem, and Princesses Eman and Rayah. They are in my special prayers, as is Queen Noor.

King Hussein was a dear and compassionate man, with an understanding that will not be easily duplicated. But I'm sure King Abdullah will follow closely in his father's footsteps and will lead Jordan into the next century with grace and dignity, just as his late father had done.

Sandy Shahwan
U.S.

"We are from God and to Him we shall return"

WITH TEARS of love and heartfelt mourning for our King, we would like to express our deep grief and sorrow over the passing of our great father and brother, the late King Hussein Ben Talal. The King's death is a 'huge' loss, not only for the Hashemite family and us, the Jordanian family, but also for all the Arab & Islamic nations as well as the world at large. It is an indescribable loss for peace-loving forces anywhere. It is a tragic loss to humanity in general.

We have stood always, and will continue forever, God willing, to stand by our beloved Jordan. We will do whatever we can to make sure that our new King succeeds in his challenge. The higher national interests of our beloved Jordanian people are our paramount objective. If there is anything that we can do at this serious crossroads of our history, we are available anytime! We will remain loyal and faithful to our country and its leadership. We will firmly stand beside you in words and deeds in coming dark and bright days of the history of our beloved country.

Our support is based on firm principles of national unity and the pursuance of peace and a better tomorrow. This is our moral and national duty, this is the least we can do for our beloved Jordan.

Our country Jordan is about to embark on a new era. The new King will lead the way, but we all need each other to meet future challenges.

And, only by cooperation, support, understanding and determination will we prevail. We reiterate our support in words and deeds. We need our late King Hussein's wisdom, common sense, insight and vigilance and a sense of responsibility before God and the nation. I feel optimistic about King Abdullah's leadership quality to carry on his father's banner and continue the struggle and the march towards a brighter future for our wonderful Jordanian people.

God's destiny is above all! God bless you all.

Dr. Jamal A. Shurdom
The Founder & Executive Director
The Middle East Consultations & Research Analysis-MECRA & The Jordan Affairs Journal Post
Office Box 677972 Orlando, Florida 32867
U.S.

WITH GREAT sorrow in my heart, I still have a difficult time believing he is among the departed. I will always remember his courage, and persistence.

In his death he has brought together statesman from the four corners of the world. Friends and enemies alike. I hope when they depart they become inspired to help make our world a more tranqual and forgiving place.

Family Dov Ben Essine
California
U.S.

WE ARE all very disturbed at the death of our Great King, His Majesty King Hussein of Jordan. King Hussein was a great father, a world leader and a modest King. We sincerely mourn the death of a great human being who has always brought peace and stability to Jordan and it's neighbours.

We would like to offer our deepest condolences to all of you in Jordan and abroad.

We pray that Jordan will continue it's path towards peace, democracy, and prosperity, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah Ben Al Hussein. God give him faith and hope for the future.

God rest the soul of King Hussein.

Hanna S. Jahshan & Family
Amman

IN MY name and on behalf of Jordanian students in Malaysia, I would like to express my heartfelt condolences and heartfelt sympathies to King Abdullah and the Hashemite family over the passing of King Hussein.

We wish King Abdullah continued good health and happiness and our Jordanian people further progress and prosperity under King Abdullah's leadership.

Mohammad Abu Ghazleh
PhD Student
Malaysia

IT IS with a great shock that I have learnt of the untimely death of His Majesty King Hussein (Abu Abdullah). The loss is, as the whole world says, not only to the Royal Family but to the Islamic Nation, the region and the world, because the King was a great man.

To me and my family in Sudan and Britain the King was everything. His guidance and support will forever be valued by me and my family. However, as Muslims we accept that Allah is the only one that decides when each of us should come to Him. Let us take comfort in this. We know that His Majesty remains alive in all our hearts. The good things that the King did for his people and for the world during his life on this earth, puts him in good stead before his Creator. Blessings to the Royal family and the Jordanian nation.

Abubakr Mohyeldin Tahir and Family
Liverpool Business School
98 Mount Pleasant,
Liverpool L3 5UZ, United Kingdom

IT HAS been a great privilege for me, an American, to have lived in Jordan for the last twenty-five years with Hussein Ben Talal as my King. While much of the Arab World is only faintly understood in the West, King Hussein was the one leader, in my opinion, who could represent the Arabs in the best sense of the word. I have always been proud to claim Jordan as my "home," and much of this pride comes from being identified with His Majesty King Hussein.

Probably more important to me even, than all of King Hussein's remarkable accomplishments in surviving and building a Kingdom, which many see as the "jewel" of the Arab World, is the man himself. There have been mighty kings and rulers in the past who have built kingdoms and countries by the power of their armies and weapons. This obviously is not the case of Jordan.

No one who has followed the proceedings of the last couple of weeks can deny that the King left a mighty footprint on this planet that will never be forgotten. He is a model of what a true statesman and leader should be — regal and yet common, strong and yet compassionate, a visionary, and yet responsive to real and immediate human needs around him. It is Al-Hussein, the man, that brought leaders from all over the world to his funeral. It is Al-Hussein, the man, that is drawing simple people by the thousands from villages and cities and tents all over Jordan to offer their condolences. It is the memory of Al-Hussein that will bring a lump to the throats of many of us for days and months to come.

The world has lost one of its greatest leaders and warriors for peace and we, his Jordanian "family," mourn this loss and the great hole that has been left in our lives.

Our condolences and sympathies to the Hashemite family. Our prayers are with His Majesty King Abdullah, that he will carry on the tradition of his father with the same dignity, strength, wisdom and human goodness.

Bob Robertson
Amman

AMATEUR RADIO operators from all over the world will certainly miss you, King Hussein. We know that this was your favourite bobby, and you used it to relax and be in touch with your fellow amateurs who were always so honoured to hear you on the air. Personally, it was the most memorable contact I ever made. To be able to speak with you from my home in 1989, and surprise you with a few words of Arabic is something that will never be forgotten. During those years spent listening after you, I also discovered a second 'family' in Jordan that I otherwise would have never been known.

That discovery has led to four visits to Jordan since 1986 to visit many friends. Those visits have already created a lifetime of memories; my heart knows that there will be more trips in the future to be with that family again.

No longer will there be such excitement on the ham radio frequencies as there was when your warm, deep voice signed your callsign, JY1. We have indeed lost a true friend to our hobby — and to the world.

Bob Johnson,
(W9XY from the U.S. JY8XY from Jordan)
U.S.

ON BEHALF of the Slovenian community and my family I would like to join all Jordanians and express our deepest sympathy on the passing of our beloved King, His Majesty King Hussein Ben Talal to the Royal Hashemite Family and wish the new King, His Majesty King Abdullah all the best in leading Jordan. At the same time, I would like to thank our President His Excellency Milan Kucan for joining the world in bidding our beloved King farewell and coming to the funeral to express the feeling of the Slovenian People and their unlimited love for His Majesty King Hussein Ben Talal.

Meta Hiasat
Amman

ON BEHALF of myself and my family, and all the Jordanians who live in our small community in the town of Campbellsville, Kentucky, I would like to send our sincere condolences to His Majesty King Abdullah Ben Al Hussein and all members of the Royal Family, and to all the Jordanians home and abroad, for the death of the father and the leader King Hussein.

He was an inspiration to all of us, and we identified ourselves with him.

We are proud of being Jordanian, we are proud that we had a leader and a father figure like King Hussein. He will always be alive in our hearts and minds. We will always be loyal to our country and to our new leader King Abdullah.

Elias Yousef Abugahzaleh
U.S.

Bulgarian delegation

AS BULGARIA was omitted in the list of countries attending the funeral ceremony of King Hussein, printed in the Jordan Times, we hope that Bulgaria's attendance can be recognised in today's or the next issue of the Jordan Times, either in a brief notice, or perhaps by printing an amended list of countries in attendance. Thank you.

The Bulgarian delegation:

1. His Excellency Mr. Veselin Metodiev, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of education and science of the Republic of Bulgaria;

2. H. E. Mr. Marin Raikov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs;

3. Mr. Ludmill Spasov, Chief of "Middle East and North Africa" Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;

4. Mr. Lubomir Todrov, Charge d'Affaires of the Bulgarian Embassy in Amman.

Embassy of Bulgaria
Amman

AIRBUS INDUSTRIE

NOEL FORGEARD
MANAGING DIRECTOR

We belong to God, and to Him we shall return

Airbus Industrie, stunned by the tragic death of His Majesty King Al Hussein Ben Talal, Dean of the Hashemite Dynasty, offers its profuse condolences to His Majesty King Abdullah Ben Al Hussein, His Royal Highness Prince Hamzah Ben Al Hussein, the Crown Prince, and all members of the illustrious Hashemite family.

We implore Almighty God to admit the deceased into His vast mercy, and to inspire his kin, his people, and the Arab and Islamic nation with the sweetest solace and fortitude.

In the name and on behalf of all the personnel at Airbus Industrie.

Noël Forgeard
Managing Director

Donors cut aid to Egypt, urge continued reform

PARIS (R) — International donors cut their assistance to Egypt in 1999 by about one billion dollars and said the decline reflected a smaller need for aid as private investment becomes increasingly important for the economy.

The donors, led by a U.S. pledge of $800 million, offered $1.5 billion in grants and concessional loans to Egypt for the coming year, the World Bank said Friday.

The World Bank said that in addition to the aid, the international community would make available a further $1 billion in long-term development loans on a non-concessional basis.

It said about two-thirds of the $1.5 billion pledged would be grants with the rest in the form of loans at below-market interest rates. The bank expects $800-$900 million of the aid to be disbursed in 1999.

Egyptian Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid said the gathering had been Egypt's most successful Consultative Group meeting ever, and pointed proudly to the government's economic reform programme.

"We enjoy an almost balanced budget, an inflation rate almost as low as in the European Community, a very low external debt and a reasonable cushion in terms of foreign exchange reserves," Ebeid told a news conference at the end of the two-day donors' meeting.

Egypt's deficit represents less than one per cent of gross domestic product and its inflation rate in the 1997/1998 period was 3.8 per cent, World Bank figures show.

Ebeid and Economy Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali expressed no concern about the decline in concessional aid and said they expected private investment and non-concessional loans to make up for the fall.

"I wouldn't see it so much as a drop in foreign assistance to Egypt as much as I would see it as a maturing of the (aid) programme to better suit the new means of the Egyptian economy, with less emphasis on resources and more emphasis on developing self-sustaining programmes," Boutros Ghali said.

The government is counting on investment of about 80 billion Egyptian pounds ($23.5 billion) a year for the next five years with 75 per cent of that from the private sector.

It hopes the investment will fuel economic growth of 6.9 per cent for the five years to 2001/02 rising to 7.6 per cent a year on average until 2017.

The Egyptian ministers were backed by World Bank officials, who said Cairo had been successful in reforming its economy, cutting poverty and boosting social programmes.

The donors nevertheless warned Egypt there was still a lot of work to do and urged the government to accelerate its privatisation programme and cut import tariffs.

They also warned that Egypt was too reliant on oil and pressed it to diversify its sources of income from exports.

Ebeid on Thursday told the meeting of 15 donor countries and 10 international organisations at the World Bank here that Egypt needs international aid to help improve its education, health, and training facilities and to create jobs if it is to maintain its economic development into the 21st century.

"The cost is so high, and the resources are limited, but something has to be done, and so fast," Ebeid told the delegates.

The last meeting in May 1997 pledged $2.5 billion (2.2 billion euros) for 1997-98, $1.5 billion of it in donations and the rest in loans.

Egypt was understood to be seeking pledges totalling some $2.0 billion from this meeting.

Ebeid said his government has carried out wide-ranging structural reform of its economy, including privatisation of the state-owned sector, due to be completed in 2000, and noted that the private sector share of economic output is 70 per cent and expected to rise to 75 per cent by the end of the century.

But he said that Egypt must further improve training and research to be able to sell itself as "an attractive place for international investment."

The country also needs to accelerate its development to create jobs for the 500,000 people graduating from university and technical college each year, as well as the tens of thousands of unemployed due to years of slow growth and job losses due to privatisation, he said.

"Egypt fully realises that sustainable and high growth rates are achieved through the quality rather than the quantity of investment," which comes through technological expertise and management knowhow, Ebeid said.

"It is also sure that the fuel for that engine is the blend of education, training and health," he added.

Japan cuts key interest rate

TOKYO (R) — Japan's central bank Friday cut a key short-term interest rate to help the flagging economy, but steered clear of more drastic moves floated by politicians to curb the rising long-term rates that could threaten recovery.

Economists said the decision by the Bank of Japan's (BOJ) policy board to initially lower its target for the overnight call rate in the money market to around 0.15 per cent from 0.25 per cent would have limited impact on the real economy, and predicted the BOJ would face yet more pressure to act more boldly.

"It seems like a very token measure," said Matthew Poggi, an economist at Lehman Brothers.

The policy board meeting — one of the most closely watched in the central bank's recent history — came amidst a heated debate at home and abroad over whether and how monetary policy should be used to reflate the battered economy.

Domestic political pressure has mounted on the central bank to act amidst concern that high long-term rates will scuttle hopes of recovery.

U.S. officials have stressed also that monetary policy is a key tool to get Japan's economy out of its slump, given that massive public spending looks unlikely to do the job on its own.

The policy board, in announcing the short-term rate cut, said it was worried that the rise in long-term interest rates would hurt the economy and added that it would guide the overnight call rate down "as low as possible" in line with market conditions.

The policy board kept the official discount rate at its record low of 0.5 per cent. It last eased monetary policy in September 1998, when it set the 0.25 per cent call rate target.

But it said the BOJ would seek to expand money supply by supplying more ample funds to the market, increase its use of Japanese Government Bond (JGB) repurchase operations, and cut its rate for emergency lending to financial institutions as a way to ease the corporate credit crunch.

The policy board also said it would keep unchanged its outright purchases of JGBs in the secondary market. It made no mention at all of the most controversial proposal by politicians — that it should underwrite government bonds directly.

BOJ executives had repeatedly rejected that step as one which would undermine confidence in the central bank, weaken the yen and open the door to hyper-inflation and limitless public spending.

Economists have been sharply divided on what steps the BOJ should take, but many analysts had predicted it was unlikely to move drastically this time.

Politicians have been pressuring the BOJ to act to offset recent rises in long-term interest rates sparked by worries that the market cannot digest a flood of government bonds expected this year to finance mammoth stimulus packages.

On Friday, both Obuchi and Finance Minister Kiichi Miyazawa gave a nod to the prickly BOJ's desire to preserve its independence from such pressure, saying any decision on monetary policy was up to the central bank.

Some economists said the central bank had done what it should.

"Basically, they have done the right thing. I think it is a positive development for the economy," said Gerald Lyons, chief economist at DKB International in London.

"It will probably have a very minimal impact, but it does show that the BOJ is responding to the economic situation, that it is being as accomodating as can be," he told Reuters Television.

Others said pressure was hardly likely to fade.

Japanese policy-makers will get a chance to hear what the United States and other Group of Seven (G-7) rich nations have to say when G-7 finance ministers and central bankers meet in in Bonn, Germany on Feb. 20.

The next policy board meeting will be Feb. 25.

"The drum beats will reach crescendos in two weeks," said Peter Morgan, economist at HSBC Securities in Tokyo.

Greenspan part of 'Committee to Save the World' — Time

NEW YORK (AFP)— U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan and two other top U.S. economic policymakers comprise "the Committee to Save the World," Time magazine says.

In its issue appearing on newsstands Monday, Time lauds Greenspan, Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and Deputy Treasury Secretary Larry Summers for crafting policies that have averted economic disasters and created global financial stability leading to unprecedented U.S. prosperity.

The trio is responsible for "making investors deliriously, perhaps delusionally, happy in the process," Times says in its Feb. 15 issue.

"To help resolve the riddle of imperfect markets, the committee has spent six years working on an experiment. It's called the U.S. economy," the report says.

Common to the three men is a reliance on rigourous analysis instead of politics, "a passion for thinking and an inextinguishable curiosity about a new economic order that is unfolding before them like and Alice in Wonderland world," Time says.

"In analytical people, self-esteem relies on the analysis and not on the conclusions," the magazine quotes Greenspan as saying.

The Federal Reserve chief is an ardent disciple of novelist and "objectivist" social critic Ayn Rand.

Throughout its deliberations, the "committee" agrees that defying global markets is futile.

The shadow of a massive economic meltdown has helped the three men sell a market-driven policy that the magazine calls "Realeconomik," which, while fuelling unprecedented U.S. growth, also has brought agony to many developing economies.

The committee believes the International Monetary Fund is a key tool, especially as it works to clean up abuse that led to the current mess and makes it easier for investors to get back into developing markets.

Time gives the triumvirate credit for stopping a 1997 panic about Korean debt from prompting a U.S. market crash, nudging U.S. President Bill Clinton into budgetary agreements that helped create the first surplus in 29 years, and averting a worldwide crisis by bailing out Mexico in 1995.

Clinton listens and, according to Rubin," has within him the framework to do what was best for the global economy."

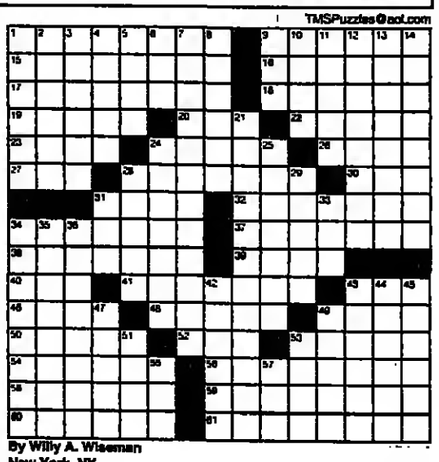
"They have done a masterful job so far," the magazine quotes Morgan Stanley economist Stephen Roach.

"Unfortunately, in financial markets you are only as good as your last move. If Greenspan's legacy is a stock-market bubble, he will not be treated kindly by history," Roach said.

THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

TMSPuzzles@aol.com



ACROSS
1 Fixes in place
9 Shaken instrument
15 Zoological designation
16 Duty and Walsh
17 One to whom a document is transferred
18 St. Nicks
19 Extreme discomfort
20 Existed once
22 Revere
23 Traditional tales
24 Nativity
26 Kimono sashes
27 987-65-4321 grp.
28 Position under scrutiny
30 Resp.
31 Country humor
32 Archaic interjection
34 On the loose
37 Patrons
38 City near Beirem
39 Mandlikova of tennis
40 Individual Apples
41 Being Impertinent
43 CO add-on?
46 Just manages
48 Markets
49 French soldier's cap
50 Fissures
52 Comic Caesar
53 Made bovine noises
54 Surfer's inhalations
56 Cutting short
58 Opal ending?
59 Eggs, fish, and rice dish
60 Inscribed monuments
61 Gym shoes

DOWN
1 Commits theft
2 Ballroom dances
3 Writer Welty
4 Make right
5 Flat-bottomed rowboat
6 Green card org.
7 Observers
8 Besmirches
9 Wife's address: abbr.
10 Perfect report card
11 Last movement of a sonata
12 German highway
13 Woodwind
14 Evaluates
21 Second family
24 Lucrezia and Cesare
25 Fiske, Stone and Ellison
28 Son of Osiris
29 Making knots
31 Oriole Ripken
33 Pekoe, e.g.
34 Spreads insinuations
35 Most lacking in good taste
36 Suffer a reputation setback
42 Floating oil spills
43 Upgrade the circuitry
44 First game
45 Gnatlike flies
47 Writer Madame de __
49 Russian coin
51 Trig. function
53 Org. of Pepper and Webb
55 Nose-tackles' cohorts, briefly
57 Poetic piece

By Willy A. Wiseman
New York, NY

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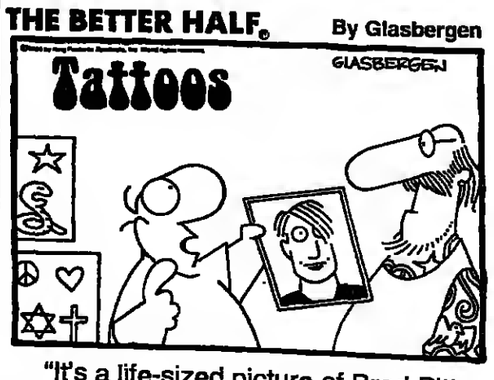
Peanuts

Andy Capp

Mutt'n'Jeff

THE BETTER HALF®

By Glasbergen



"It's a life-sized picture of Brad Pitt. I want you to tattoo it on my face."

JUMBLE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

RYRUH

ASSOB

GOTTOR

SERVTY

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Print answer here:

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: OUTDO HEFTY SUGARY LACKEY
Answer: Air pollution does this — NO EARTHLY GOOD

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Produce exporters seek financing to support marketing schemes

** ACCORDING TO Kheir Eddin Shukri, board chairman of the society that groups producers and exporters of fruits and vegetables, the weak coordination between public and private sectors is one of the most important hindrances facing the efforts of the society to serve exports, exporters and farmers. He blasted both sectors for not being interested in coordination saying that there is no coordination between the official institutions themselves.

Other main barriers mentioned by Shukri were the absence of a specific strategy for outside markets and for diversifying outlets and the unwillingness to consider large credits by the Agricultural Credit Corporation (ACC). He explained that big productive projects require large capital in excess of JD100,000 whereas the ACC extends mostly small loans.

Shukri indicated that the society is now concentrating its efforts on opening new European markets including those in eastern Europe. He said the markets of the former Soviet Union could be an alternative to Gulf markets if we manage them carefully and enter them in cooperation between the ACC and the private sector.

Within this framework, the society will work on securing the refrigerated trucks because the air transport through Royal Jordanian is very limited as the annual capacity does not exceed 3,000 tonnes, Shukri added noting that airfreight through other airlines is very costly. Furthermore, the society will try to cooperate with official parties in order to arrive at transport agreements with Russia for lowering the entry fees on refrigerated trucks. Shukri said the entrance fees to these markets is double the charges imposed by other countries such as Syria and Turkey.

The chairman pointed out that the society is working to find international financiers and agencies to support the agricultural marketing projects in Jordan.

Shukri wanted the government represented by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Marketing Organisation to always put the farmers into the picture of decisions that will be taken in the future or to draw their attention to such decisions because, first and foremost, the beneficiary or the loser is the farmer himself. "The former governments have backed the farmers to plant apple trees and potatoes in the south," he said.

Referring to the agricultural calendar with Lebanon, the head of the society described it as harmful to the (interests) of Jordanian farmers in terms of timing. "We are not against the official institutions for the sake of opposition because the objective is the same and mutual," he stressed. "We tell the government that it is necessary to have a balance in the agreement in order to utilise the principle of competitive advantage between Jordan and Lebanon."

Shukri concluded by explaining that it is for us to reach self-sufficiency in apples and potatoes and for Lebanon it is difficult to attain self-sufficiency in tomatoes and watermelons. As such, he said, why can't there be a balance in these products (Al Dustour).

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Follow the rules today, even if you don't feel like it. The structure is providing you with more support than you know. You're lucky, but not if you just act on your every whim. If you try to bend the rules today, you'll be sadly disappointed, but if you remember those, and such other classics as gravity, you could be quite successful.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Something that happens today could remind you of a prior occurrence. Instead of going on the defensive, relax. This is a different day, a different time, a different place, and a completely different person, even if you're with the same person you were with before. Believe in love and give the gift of your listening. Miracles can happen.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Take your worries and troubles and put them all in a pile, right there on the edge of the frozen lake. Then, put on your skates and kick off. Skate across that beautiful frozen lake, as if all those worries and troubles and fears mean nothing more than a place to start from. Today, that's just about the best use for them.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) You'll be great at wheeling and dealing today, so go by the garage sales and swap meets and horse auctions and whatever else you can find. You will really drive an excellent bargain. Experience would come in handy, but if you don't have any, you'll gain some. You might even do better selling than buying, so hang out your shingle, too.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) Work you've done in the past is bringing you attention today, most of it favourable. You've made a good impression, and your reputation has preceded you. They're talking about you behind your back, but what they're saying is great. Don't get cocky, though. They're saying you're a good worker, so prove it, even if it is your day off.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) You can think of lots of things that need to be done today. Well, guess what? Its never going to get done, not all of it, anyway. You'll always think of more. But there's one thing you may not even have on your list, and that is to relax with the ones you love most. Today, play first and work later.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You've got an idea of exactly how you want something to be, and today, you could create the material object that fits your pictures. Keep going for the ideal, but don't despair if it doesn't quite look like what you had in mind. Keep after it until you get it right. Your odds of success are great.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You know that the extra time you spend studying or practising gives you an advantage over the competition, and right now it looks like you could be making a very good impression on an older person. This is somebody who can help your career, so definitely put yourself in the right place at the right time, and strut your stuff.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Don't be slowed down just because you can't afford to have something you've been lusting after. Let people know what you need, and one of them is quite likely to provide it. Or maybe you'll be able to get an old one and fix it up good and new, or even better. Today is perfect for that sort of project.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) People discussing a scheme that absolutely will not fly. But they're so stuck in the idea, they can't see the obvious problem. Surprising how impractical those intellectual types can be, isn't it? Well, you're going to have to point it out to them. Otherwise, they could sink a lot of money into something that totally won't work.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) You're still under pressure, but that's OK. You can use this condition to force yourself to do a bunch of jobs you've been putting off. This might not be the kind of work you do at the office, but then again it might. Take this idea and apply it wherever it fits.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) Its another great day for a party. You and your buddies should be out there trying new things and having all sorts of adventures. Be careful, though. Somebody could have an accident if he or she doesn't pay attention. Make sure its not you. Be careful driving, too. Get where you're going early, and avoid the drunks out there.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

British Airways, American Airlines buy 10% of Iberia

MADRID (AFP) — British Airways (BA) and American Airlines Friday signed an agreement here with the Spanish airline Iberia under which they bought 10 per cent of the Spanish group, the state holding company SEPI announced.

Industry Minister Josep Pique had earlier Friday said BA would take nine per cent of Iberia, with American Airlines getting one per cent.

Both BA and American Airlines committed themselves to participating in Iberia's capital for at least three years, and are accorded two seats on the company's board of directors, SEPI added.

Press reports put the value of the 10 per cent holding at 58 billion pesetas (348.59 million euros, $394.3 million).

Iberia full worth is said to be 580 billion pesetas.

In January, company president Xavier de Irala said that net profit last year had amounted to 37 billion pesetas (222 million euros, $260 million) from 17.11 billion pesetas in 1997.

The agreement in principle had been announced several months ago and is in the context of privatisation of Iberia which was launched recently.

The agreement is expected to result in inclusion of Iberia in the OneWorld alliance grouping British Airways, American Airlines, Canadian Airlines, Cathay Pacific and Qantas Airways.

Pique, who is also government spokesman, said that BA and American Airlines would be among so-called "hard core" shareholders, involving also institutional investors, most of which would be Spanish, which are to take 30 per cent of the equity in Iberia.

SEPI, which owns Iberia, was in touch with institutional partners.

The banks Central Hispano, Bilbao Vizcaya, Argentaria and Popular, and the hotel chain El Corte Ingles, and construction group FCC, have expressed interest in buying privatisation shares in Iberia.

Each institutional investor involved will be expected to buy 3.0-10.0 per cent of the capital and undertake to retain the holding for three to five years, SEPI President Pedro Ferreras said recently.

Employees of the airline are to hold eight per cent and the rest of the capital is to be put on the open market before the summer.

Tunisia to sell three cement plants in '99

TUNIS (R) — Tunisia plans to sell three cement plants in 1999 as part of its privatisation programme, the Economic Development Ministry has said.

Merchant banks are being asked to submit offers by Feb. 22 for the contract to advise on the sale, the ministry added in a statement to Reuters.

Tenders for the sale will be launched no later than the end of June 1999.

Production capacity is put at 660,000 tonnes per year for the Gabes plant which was established in 1997, 1.0 million tonnes for Oum Khelil which was established in 1980, and 300,000 tonnes for CAT, at Djebel Djelloiud on the outskirts of Tunis.

Tunisia started privatising its cement sector in 1998 with the sale of the Jbel Oust cement factory to Portuguese firm Cimpor at a price of $210 million and an 87.86 per cent stake in its Enfidha cement factory to Spain's Uniland Cementera at a price of $145 million.

The government's adviser for the privatisation of Jbel Oust and Enfidha was French merchant bank Rothschild.

Tunisia's clinker production capacity is put at about 4.77 million tonnes per year.

Israel bourse sees dual listings luring foreigners

TEL AVIV (R) — The Tel Aviv Stock Exchange (TASE) is setting great store on plans to ease rules on dual listings to bring in more European investment and enhance market discipline, its chairman has told a news conference.

Yair Orgler said more dual listings was one of several strategies the TASE was employing to attract more overseas investors.

He said the TASE was considering allowing "remote members," foreign brokers that join the TASE without having offices in Tel Aviv. Orgler said the TASE was also seeking to rid itself of its emerging market designation, which has become a negative factor after the collapse of markets in Asia and Russia.

The government is expected later this year to approve rules making it easier to simultaneously list companies abroad and on the TASE.

Orgler said be hoped the change would lure many of the 100 Israeli companies now traded overseas — most of them technology stocks — into a Tel Aviv listing as well.

He said more high tech offerings on the TASE would increase foreign investment, which last year reached 12.8 per cent of total market capitalisation from 6.7 per cent in 1994.

"Dual listing will attract foreign investment from Europe," he said. "We are competitive in terms of (trading) costs and more convenient in terms of time difference."

The TASE has been in the doldrums since the Russian financial crisis exploded last August, causing overseas emerging market investors to pull out of Israeli stocks.

Local investors, who Orgler said had started to show renewed interest in stocks, also retreated as domestic interest rates were pushed higher.

Ronit Harel Ben-Ze'ev, the TASE's vice president for listings and economics, said dual listings could be a major contribution to increasing trading volume, especially if the top 15 volume leaders among U.S.-traded Israeli stocks opted to list on the TASE.

She cited ECI Telecom, whose turnover on Tuesday was $50 million versus 109 million shekels ($26.7 million) for the entire TASE.

Orgler said he did not think increased numbers of dual listings would have a pronounced effect on valuations, although Israeli stocks traded in the United States tend to trade at higher multiples.

"What's more meaningful is to import U.S. market discipline to Israel," he said.

Saul Bronfeld, the TASE's managing director, said larger numbers of arbitrage shares could help moderate Tel Aviv's volatility by increasing Wall Street's influence.

Officials said they were also exploring ways of encouraging Israeli high-tech companies to go public in Israel before listing in the United States.

Harel Ben-Ze'ev said the TASE's listing requirements did not discriminate against young technology companies and that the key was marketing.

"We have to convince them it's good for them and do the marketing. If we had two or three good examples they would come," she said.

Coke launches $5 million Gulf promotion in Cola war

KUWAIT CITY (AFP) — Coca-Cola has launched its biggest promotional campaign in the Gulf region in an effort to consolidate sales.

The campaign has a budget of $5 million and some 2.5 million gifts for consumers, the official news agency KUNA reported.

Director general of Coke's sole agent in Kuwait said its share of the market in the Gulf Cooperative Council — which groups the emirate with Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — had risen to 42 per cent.

Ahmad Al Najdi said Coke's market share was now 35 per cent in Kuwait itself, a figure he expected to increase to 40 per cent during the shopping festival in February.

In July, Coca-Cola said it increased to about 30 per cent its share of the lucrative Arab Gulf soft drinks market, valued by industry sources at some $1.2 billion a year.

Coca-Cola was excluded from the Gulf market for many years because of the Arab boycott of companies which traded with Israel. It opened a factory in Kuwait in 1994.

Iran reschedules foreign debt

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran has rescheduled $2 billion of foreign debt and obtained a new credit line of $1.3 billion, central bank governor Mohsen Nurbakhsh has told newspapers.

"Our commercial partners have agreed to reschedule two billion dollars of short-term debts, which now become long-term debts to be paid over 33 months," he said without further details.

Nurbakhsh said he had obtained $1.3 billion of new credits designed to finance imports, following his trip last week to France and Italy, two of Iran's major European trading partners.

Iran's total foreign debt, including short-term obligations run to a total of $23 billion, Nurbakhsh said.

Iran is currently facing a severe shortfall in government revenues, prompted by the dramatic fall in the price of oil which provides over 80 per cent of the country's foreign exchange.

A growing number of Iranian companies have defaulted on their debts since last November in what one foreign banker described as a mounting "cashflow crisis."

French coach says world champion team getting stronger

LONDON (AP) — Winning at Wembley can hardly compare with a World Cup triumph. But it convinced cnach Roger Lemerre that France is a worthy world champion and has much to teach tired old teams like England.

"You have to remember we are the world champions," Lemerre said after his team's first wio at the home of English soccer.

"It's not an accident that we won this game.

"After England won the World Cup in 1966 it dominated for a few years. There is no reason why we shouldn't do the same."

Lemerre's team outplayed England during the second half at Wembley to score a 2-0 victory with goals hy England-based Nicolas Anelka. It should have been 3-0 hecause Anelka also had a shot that hit the underside of the har and hounced behind the line before coming hack into a play.

That one wasn't spotted hy the linesman and that was a good joh for the home team because no one had beaten England hy three gnals at Wembley since Hungary's famous 6-3 triumph in 1953.

The England fans among the 74,111 sellout crowd drifted away in dismay in the knowledge their stars had been beaten by a superior team. In four previous visits to Wemhley France had lost 4-0, 2-0, 5-0 and 2-0 and, in terms of results, this was a big turnaround and Lemerre said it was a landmark victory for French soccer.

"France had never won at Wembley before and never scored a goal against England here," he said. "It's an exceptional thing for a French team to win here before the stadium is knocked down and rebuilt."

But it came as no surprise.

English soccer was reeling from last week's firing of coach Glenn Hoddle over remarks he reportedly made that the disabled were being punished "for the sins of an earlier" life.

France's Zinedine Zidane, centre, attempts a shot as England's Darren Anderton, left, Tony Adams, right, and Martin Keown, No. 6, during their International friendly soccer match in London's Wembley stadium, Wednesday Feb. 10, 1999 (AP photo)

Amid a public outcry over the remarks, Hoddle was dismissed and replaced on a temporary hasis hy the Foothall Association's director of foothall Howard Wilkinson who had little more than a week to prepare the team for Wednesday's game.

He dismantled Hoddle's 3-5-2 formation and went back to an old-fashioned 4-4-2, recalling veteran Lee Dixon, 35 next month, to join Arseoal colleagues Tony Adams and Martin Keown in defence.

But, according to Lemerre, even a fully-prepared England lineup would have had problems with his team at Wembley.

"I was very difficult for England because France played very well, especially in the second balf when we really dominated," said the French coach, who took over from Aime Jacquet after the World Cup triumph.

"The English put the French under pressure at the start and we did well to come through that. But we began to pass the ball very well and that is our strength and our style of play.

"It was Aime Jacquet who built this French team to sense weaknesses in the opposition and to exploit those weaknesses," Lemerre said. "The longer the game went on the stronger we became.

"Anelka had a lot of good ball and, with his speed, he was able to take advantage of some good passing."

With FIFA player of the year Zinedine Zidane running the show in the second half with his passiog, layoffs and visionary play, the French repeatedly pulled the English defense apart in the secnnd half.

Didier Deschamps, his Juventus colleague, and fullhacks Lilian Thuram of Parma and Bayern Munich's Bixente Lizarazu also had standout performances while Anelka made Freoch soccer history by becoming the first player from his country to scnre against England at Wembley.

"Some of our players who play in England and in Italy are improving their technique and getting stronger," Lemerre said.

"That means our team is getting better all the time."

Babe Ruth's autograph lifted from public records

BOSTON (AP) — A half century after his death, getting a copy of a signature hy baseball legend Babe Ruth can cost tens nf thousands of dollars. Even then, it's hard to be completely sure, in this day of fakes and forgeries, that you have the genuine article.

But someone found a way to get the Babe's real signature — guaranteed — absolutely free.

Rifling througb puhlic documents, a thief pilfered deeds to the farm he hought in a Boston suhurb in the 1920s.

It's the most recent in a spate in the United States of cnurthouse thefts of wills, deeds and other documents signed hy American basehall stars.

"It's the first time I've ever heard of it happening," said Michael Ring, the Middlesex County First Assistant Register of Deeds in Camhridge. "But value is in the eye of the beholder.

It's like an anóque — to some people it's an antique, to nthers it's just an old piece of furniture."

Ring said two documeots are missing altogether and the signature of Ruth and his first wife, Helen, were cut out of a third. He said whoever took the signatures souck them away from a counter under the watch of clerks.

In nearby Bostoo, documents with the signatures of three Hall of Fame players — George Wright, Hugh Duffy and Tommy McCarthy — had been reported missing from the Suffolk County Courthouse.

All played in the late 1800s.

Prosecutors this week charged a county probation officer, 55-year-old Joseph Schnabel of Pembroke, with larceny in the disappearance of the will of Wright's wife, Ahhie, which bore her hushand's signature. He's also charged with taking a document with the signature of Hall of Fame umpire Thomas Conoolly.

Boston police and the FBI are continuing to investigate, according to Suffolk County prosecutor Gerald Stewart.

The Babe Ruth documents date hack to when he bought "Home Run Farm," a sprawling property on Dutton Road in Sudbury where he lived and raised farm animals.

They ioclude a record of a $ 6,000 mortgage payment in June 1923 and a deed to convey the property to his wife in October 1925. The signatures were clipped out of a third document, a deed that conveyed the property from Helen Ruth to a Weston man in April 1926.

Ruth was playing for the New York Yankees when he bought the house. He was a member of the last Red Sox team to win the World Series in 1918, and was sold to the Yankees following the 1919 season.

Winning Lazio continue to climb in European rankings

LONDON (R) — Lazio, who moved up to second in the European cluh rankings this week with a 3-0 win over Perugia, chase their 10th successive league victory when they visit middle-of-the-table Cagliari in Serie A on Sunday.

Lazio lead a posse of Italian clubs chasing clear leaders Bayern Munich in the rankings. Fiorentina are third, Parma fourth and Inter Milan have moved up to fifth.

Another side on a roll is Barcelona, up to 11th this week after a seventh win in a row away to Extremadura.

To keep the run going they will have to beat European champions and arch-rivals Real Madrid in the Reuters European match of the week.

TOP 20 CLUB RANKINGS (last week's position in brackets)

Points		
(1) 1 Bayern Munich	Germany	100.94
(3) 2 Lazio	Italy	92.55
(2) 3 Fiorentina	Italy	89.82
(4) 4 Parma	Italy	88.79
(8) 5 Inter Milan	Italy	85.75
(5) 6 Girondins Bordeaux	France	85.12
(6) 7 Bayer Leverkusen	Germany	84.19
(7) 8 Olympique Marseille	France	83.92
(9) 9 Dynamo Kiev	Ukraine	81.93
(11) 10 Manchester United	England	81.55
(12) 11 Barcelona	Spain	78.81
(10) 12 AC Milan	Italy	78.16
(16) 13 Celta Vigo	Spain	77.50
(14) 14 Rosenborg Trondheim	Norway	76.94
(15) 15 Dinamo Bucharest	Romania	76.91
(19) 16 Real Madrid	Spain	75.03
(17) 17 Porto	Portugal	74.44
(13) 18 AS Roma	Italy	74.23
(18) 19 Partizan Belgrade	Yugoslavia	73.90
(21) 20 Bologna	Italy	73.74

Worst five rankings

(466) 466 Doxa Katokopia	Cyprus	17.80
(468) 467 Hapoel Beit'Shan	Israel	16.28
(467) 468 B93 Copenhagen	Denmark	16.25
(469) 469 Maccabi Jaffa	Israel	14.11
(470) 470 Tyumen	Russia	11.65

Sampras, Philippoussis win at Sybase Open

SAN JOSE, California (AP) — Pete Sampras has something to show for his time away from tennis: a blister.

Sampras rubbed his right hand on occasion Thursday night as he defeated Martin Rodriguez 7-5, 6-3 in the Syhase Open. He admitted afterward he has a small blister.

"I'm sure hy the end of the week it'll be fine," he said.

Before coming to the Sybase, Sampras took 10 weeks off.

During the sabhatical he vacationed io Hawaii and played gnlf in the Boh Hope Classic — and he had a few blisters from golf, too, he said.

Against Rodriguez, the No. 1-ranked player in the world had six aces in the 1-hour, 9-minute match. He struggled a hit in the first set, hut took over after Rodriguez evened it at 5-5.

"The key was feeling him out a hit, getting used to his strengths and weaknesses," Sampras said.

Rodriguez, ranked No. 95 in the world, had 14 unforced errors. The Argentinean cnuldn't hold serve for the final game, and Sampras won match point with a dramatic overhead smash.

The victory sends Sampras into the quarterfinals tooight against 132nd-ranked Bernd Karbacher of Germaoy.

"I'm where I want to be," he said. "I'm not playing outstanding tennis, but I'm playing well eoough to get through these matches."

Earlier Thursday, Mark Philippoussis used calm determinatioo and a 120 mph serve to easily defeat John van Lottum 6-2, 6-1.

The third-seeded Philippoussis, ranked No. 14 in the world, had eight aces against the unseeded van Lottum, including one clocked at 128 mph, in a match that lasted just 44 minutes.

The 22-year-old Australian had a tournament-best 132 mph serve in his first-round victory over Sargis Sargsian.

Down 4-1 in the second set, van Lottum appeared to give up, failing to even try for two of his opponent's serves. Ranked No. 102 in the world, van Lottum hit listlessly into the net for match point.

Throughout the match, van Lottum was rattled, crying out at times in his native Dutch. In contrast, Philippoussis was cool, often staying hack from the net and depending on his power and placement.

Philippoussis was scheduled to play wild-card entry Justio Gimelstob in today's quarterfinals. The No. 75-ranked Gimelstob defeated Chris Woodruff 6-4, 7-6 (7-3) earlier Thursday.

In the same hracket with Sampras, Philippoussis would not speculate about a semifinal match with the No. 1-ranked player.

"First of all, I've got to play Justio," he said. "I'm not going to think ahead."

The dlrs 325,000 tournament was marred Wednesday night hy the departure of fan favorite Andre Agassi, who beat Sampras last year in the finals.

Agassi defaulted Wednesday night for uttering a series of profanities during a match against 120th-ranked Cecil Mamiit. It was the second time in his career that Agassi has defaulted in a tournament hecause of cursing.

The default will cost him $ 13,000 and a loss of rankings points that could drop him nne or two places from his No. 7 world ranking.

Sampras said he was surprised by the turn of events.

"He knows the rules," Sampras said. "Just hecause he's Andre doesn't mean he can get away with something like that."

Romney hired to lead Salt Lake Olympics from scandal

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Mitt Romney, self-described as having "an overactive service gland" and hailed by nne of the two men who picked him as "the white knight," accepted the task of scouring the blemishes from Salt Lake City's Olympics organisation.

Romney, whose Boston firm turns around troubled companies, was hired to do the same fnr the 2002 Winter Games, which have been tarnished by misconduct that has scared sponsors and shaken the Olympic movement.

"These games and the preparations leading up to the games will comply with the highest level of ethical conduct," Romney vowed. "There is absolutely no excuse for the compromise of principles."

He will preside over a revamped Salt Lake Organising Committee, which has been expanded, its role reduced and three of its members forced out — two of them with a shove from Gov. Mike Leavitt, who said conflicts of interest no longer will be allowed.

Some of the changes are hard, Leavitt said, hut the Olympic Games gain their power through trust.

"This is to raise our standard to the highest possible standard," said Leavitt, who gave any board member with a perceived conflict of interest 60 days to resign.

Mitt Romney speaks to the media following his appointment as president and CEO of the Salt Lake Olympic Committee Feh. 11. Romney replaces Frank Jnklik who resigned amid the ongoing controversy around Salt Lake City's hid to win the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. Rnmney's wife Anne is at right (Reuters photo)

Romney's selection as president of SLOC will help move the Olympics' focus from "money and materialism back tn its roots of athletes and altruism," Leavitt said.

Romney, whose ancestors were Mormon pioneers, was chosen hy Leavitt and SLOC Chairman Robert Garff. Their choice was endorsed this week by a hastily formed search committee amid some complaints about a short-circuited search.

"It was my job to hire a leader now, not three or five months from now," said Garff, who alternately referred to Romney as "the white knight" and "the cream of the crop."

"We have been in a crisis and needed leadership oow," Garff said.

The reorganizing of the board and the hiriog of Romney on Thursday came two days after SLOC's ethics panel issued a report blaming executives of Salt Lake City's bid committee for giving more than $1 million in cash payments, bogus scholarships, shopping sprees, vacations and free medical care to 24 Internatiooal Olympic Committee members in exchange for getting the games.

So far, four IOC members have resigned and annther five have been expelled.

Romney said he doesn't believe the Olympic movement will be permanently stained.

"The managers have messed up big óme. The athletes haven't," he said.

Romney pledged to spend no mnre mnney than the games take in, to spare taxpayers, in protect the environment and to take no salary until the Olympics are over and in the black.

When he is paid, it will be $285,000 per year — the same rate as his predecessor, Frank Joklik, who resigned Jan. 8. Jnklik claimed to know nothing about the excesses of bid execuóves while he served as chairman of the committee.

The roles of Joklik, First Security Corp. Chairman Spence Eccles and PacifiCorp Vice President Verl Topham all came under questioo because of their importance on both the bid committee and SLOC, but the ethics panel fnund no particular fault with them beyond its general criticism of a lack of oversight of the hid managers.

Joklik will remain on SLOC's board of trustees, which was expanded from 33 to 50 at Leavitt's and Garff's suggestion. So will Eccles, and he also was elected hy fellow trustees to one of six at-large spots on the new management hoard that is to oversee Salt Lake's Olympics effort.

Topham, hy his own choice, resigned from the board. "In careful consideraóon of my own personal interests, and probahly in the interests of going forward, I submit my resignation ... and allow someone else to carry the torch forward."

Leaving the board in compliance with the new no-conflict policy were Alan Layton and Earl Holding.

SLOC has a $ 13.8 million contract with Holding to hold downhill ski races at his Snowhasin Ski Area, and to use his downtown Salt Lake City properties around Little America Hntel.

Layton's construction company has a cootract to build a $ 29 millioo enclosure of the speedskating oval in Kearns.

Layton, who earlier this week told The Salt Lake Tribune that he did not intend to resign, capitulated Thursday, saying he would step down "in the interest of Salt Lake City and the Olympic movement."

Holding's resignaóon letter said he was asked by Leavitt to serve on the board and to upgrade Snowhasin, and that he did both diligently while always disclosing his conflicts.

"While I remain firmly committed to my SLOC responsibilióes, we should respect differences of opinion. ... I believe it would be helpful if I am not part of the realignment," he said. "What we now need is not more division or distrust, hut greater understanding and reconciliaóon."

Leavitt said he wanted one more resignation, but would not identify whose. The Tribune said it was believed to he Nicholas Badami because he has ties to Park City Mountain Resort, a venue for skiing and snowboardiog events. He was not at Thursday's meeting.

Twenty trustees will be on the new management committee.

House Speaker Marty Stephens, appointed to the board of trustees Thursday, said, "The board's been purged. The message needs to go out today that this is a new era. The Mitt Romney Era has begun."

Selling the 2002 Winter Games to corporate sponsors will be a big part of Romney's focus.

Romney said he has little doubt corporations will jump at the chance to sponsor the first U.S. Winter Games in nearly two decades.

"I'll bet you see John Hancock and others like them standing in line to support the Salt Lake Olympics," Romney said, referring to comments Tuesday by the president of the insurance company. David D'Alessandro said he was protesting the IOC's failure to deal with the corruption scandal.

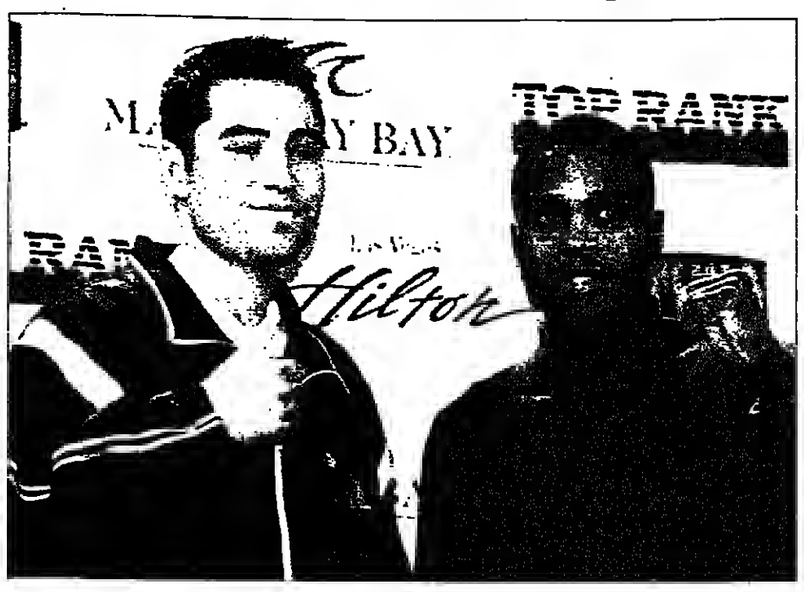
Dick Pound, the IOC vice president who negotiates key television and marketing deals, said after a meeting with 11 key sponsors in New York on Thursday that there was no indication corporations were consideriog pulling out.

"The sponsors have been very supportive of the efforts we've been making to date to clean up this problem," Pound said.

"There is nobody that has withdrawn."

The meeting between Olympic officials and spoosors lasted about three hours. Mike Sherman, a spokesman for Visa International, said, "We voiced our concerns and encouraged reforms and they listened," but declined to offer further details.

A test for De La Hoya, a fight for Quartey



Welterweight WBC champion Oscar De La Hoya, left, gestures at a news conference Wednesday, Feb. 10, 1999, in Las Vegas, with challenger Ike Quartey of Ghana, while promoting their title fight scheduled for Saturday night (AP photo)

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Finally, a test for Oscar De La Hoya.

Finally, a fight for Ike Quartey.

In what has become a rarity in boxing, two unbeaten fighters in their prime meet Saturday night when De La Hoya defends his WBC welterweight title against a boxer generally considered to be the first true test of De La Hoya's short but brilliant career.

"People realise Ike Quartey has the best chance of beating me," De la Hoya said. "This is a real, true fight."

For De La Hoya, it's a chance to pick up at least $ 9 million as well as quiet some of the critics who claim he's built his career on wins over fighters who were fading or not at their very best.

For Quartey, it's a chance to fight for the first time in 16 months. Bouts with Pernell Whitaker and Felix Trinidad fell through, and his original Nov. 21 fight with De La Hoya was postponed because of a cut over De La Hoya's left eye.

"I'll break his neck like a chicken," said Quartey, who defended the WBA version of the 147-pound title seven times before losing it for not making a mandatory defence.

De La Hoya is a 3 1/2-1 favorite to retain his WBC title against Quartey, a native of Ghana whose only blemish on his record came when Jose Luis Lopez knocked him down in the 11th round and came up with a draw.

That bout took place Oct. 17, 1997, and Quartey (34-0-1) has not fought since despite having three different dates lined up against top opponents.

Quartey was especially bitter over the postponement of his fight with De La Hoya after the champion said he suffered the cut in training. De La Hoya later appeared at a news conference showing no trace of the cut.

"I'm very angry," Quartey said. "He was trying to buy time."

De La Hoya, who stopped Julio Cesar Chavez only two months before the scheduled fight with Quartey, said he didn't want to take the chance of going into such an important fight at less than full strength.

"It was not a serious cut," De La Hoya said. "It was a slight cut across (above) the eye, but I didn't want to take a chance with a fight of this magnitude."

The postponement came after Quartey's fight last April with Whitaker was scrapped after Whitaker tested positive for cocaine, and a fight with Trinidad, the IBF welterweight champion, fell through because of promotional conflicts.

"Ike had a bad 1998," said Dino Duva, Quartey's promoter.

"But Oscar De La Hoya has made the biggest mistake of his boxing career fighting him now."

De La Hoya, who abandoned his boxing skills to go toe-to-toe with Chavez in his last fight, faces a bigger puncher in Quartey, who has stopped 29 of his 35 opponents.

De la Hoya stopped Chavez at the end of the eighth round and is now 29-0 with 24 knockouts in a career that has seen him earn more than $ 100 million in the ring.

"I need to fight the tough guys to bring out the best in me," De La Hoya said. "I'm gong to have to prepare my mind for possibly losing. Hopefully it won't happen. I'll go down as many times as I have to win."

De La Hoya is already a champion in four weight divisions and has beaten nine different current or former champions in his spectacular career. Still, he has been criticized for carefully picking his opponents, catching them at times they might not be their best.

"This fight is big because it's a barometer of where Oscar De La Hoya truly is," said Sugar Ray Leonard, who was brought in to help sell the fight.

Quartey, the youngest of 27 brothers and sisters, will earn about $ 3 million for the fight. Almost as important, he gets the chance to make a name for himself for future lucrative fights against the likes of Whitaker and Trinidad, who meet later this month.

"I've been waiting all my life for this opportunity," Quartey said.

The fight could develop into a tactical battle of jabs, with each boxer possessing one of the best in the division. If it comes to power, De La Hoya said he will be more than happy to test his punching ability against that of Quartey.

"I have what it takes to shot it out with anybody," De La Hoya said. "I can stand my ground whenever I want. But I have to ask myself if that is the smartest thing I can do to win this fight."

If De La Hoya wins, he won't have to look far to find his next opponent.

On the undercard, former three-time champion Frankie Randall is fighting Oba Carr in an elimination bout with the winner to fight De La Hoya in late May.

"That would change my life in so many ways," said the 37-year-old Randall, who made history as the first fighter to beat Chavez.

The fight card is expected to draw a crowd of about 12,000 to the UNLV campus arena. It will be televised on pay-per-view at a suggested retail of $ 39.95. The televised portion of the card begins at 1400 GMT, with the main event about 1630 GMT.

Kenny Wallace (55) spins through the west banking of Daytona International Speedway as Dan Pardus (50) passes him on the high side during the running of the first 125-mile qualifier in Daytona Beach, Fla., Thursday, Feb. 11, 1999 (AP photo)

Timberwolves beat Lakers 86-75

MIAMI (AP) — Tim Hardaway scored 13 of his 27 points and had five of his nine assists in the decisive third quarter to lead the Heat to a 102-84 victory over Toronto, Miami's sixth straight win over the Raptors.

Alonzo Mourning had 18 points and eight rebounds and Terry Porter added 16 as Miami won its first home game after two losses.

Porter and Hardaway combined to go 8-of-15 from 3-point territory and Miami outscored Toronto 30-6 on 3s.

Doug Christie scored 20 and Dee Brown added 16 to pace Toronto, losers of three straight.

Hawks 100, Hornets 88

In Atlanta, with Steve Smith leading the way, the Atlanta Hawks jumped to a 21-point lead in the first quarter and went on to beat Charlotte.

Smith scored 11 of his team-high 17 points in the opening period as the Hawks cruised to a 33-12 lead and maintained a double-figure lead the rest of the way.

Atlanta scored the first nine points and took control before many fans even took their seats. The Hawks shot 14-of-19 and outrebounded the Hornets 15-4 in the opening period, limiting Charlotte to 27 per cent (6-of-22) from the field.

Derrick Coleman led the Hornets with 17 points.

Cavaliers 99, Spurs 89

In Cleveland, Wesley Person made two key 3-pointers in the third quarter and Cleveland snapped a 10-game losing streak to San Antonio.

Person, the Cavs' best perimeter shooter, entered the game just 3-for-16 on 3-pointers but found his touch with a pair of 3s in the third when Cleveland outscored San Antonio 32-21.

The Cavs went up by 20 in the fourth period and hung on to beat the Spurs for the first time since March 23, 1993.

Shawn Kemp had 25 points and 12 rebounds and Zydrunas Ilgauskas added 17 for the Cavs. Tim Duncan had 31 points and 14 rebounds to lead the Spurs, who dropped their third in a row.

Magic 87, Pistons 81

In Auburn Hills, Michigan, Penny Hardaway scored 22 points, including seven down the stretch, to lead Orlando.

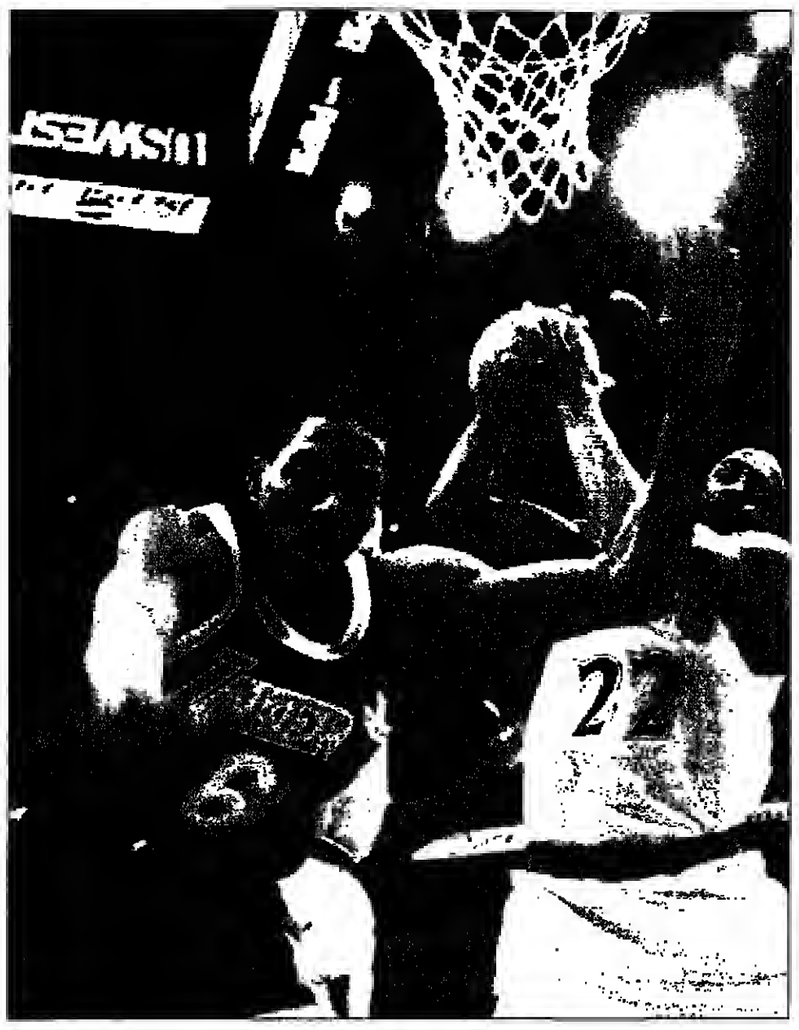
Grant Hill scored 25 for the Pistons, who looked tired and out of sync for the first time in five games.

The Pistons worked the deficit down to three points four times late in the game — the last at 84-81 on a layup by Bison Dele with 53 seconds remaining. Hill appeared to make it a one-point game on a layup with 29.9 seconds left, but instead picked up an offensive foul.

Hill missed a jumper from near the free throw line with 19.3 seconds left, and Darrell Armstrong closed out the scoring with three free throws for the Magic.

Timberwolves 86, Lakers 75

In Minneapolis, with Shaquille O'Neal on the bench with an injury, the Lakers suffered through one of the worst shooting nights in franchise history and Kevin Garnett scored 21 points to lead Minnesota.



Minnesota Timberwolves center Dean Garrett (22) grabs a rebound from a layup by Los Angeles Lakers forward Eddie Jones (6) during the first half of NBA action Feb. 11 (Reutres Photo)

O'Neal, who led the Lakers in scoring in the first four games and was second in the NBA with a 30.5 average, sat out with a strained right abdominal muscle. He sustained the injury Wednesday night at Denver and will be reevaluated Friday.

The Lakers needed to hit three straight shots in the final minute to avoid the franchise-worst 31.2 per cent shooting they endured against Denver on Nov. 12, 1993.

Sam Mitchell had 20 points and six rebounds off the bench, and Joe Smith added 17 points for Minnesota.

Rockets 105, Mavericks 95

In Dallas, rookie Michael Dickerson scored 21 points, including a game-sealing 3-pointer with 2:04 left, as Houston downed Dallas for the 10th consecutive time.

Dickerson, a first-round draft pick from Arizona, came into the game averaging just four points. His 3-pointer gave Houston a 97-88 lead and Dallas couldn't recover.

Charles Barkley had 16 points and 15 rebounds for the Rockets, Scottie Pippen scored 16, Othella Harrington had 13 and Stanley Roberts 10.

Robert Pack scored 31 points for Dallas, Michael Finley had 15 and Shawn Bradley and Cedric Ceballos scored 10 each.

Bucks 95, Nets 75

In Milwaukee, George Karl's home debut was effective if not elegant as the Milwaukee Bucks beat short-handed and cold-shooting New Jersey.

The injury-riddled Nets got a big scare when forward Keith Van Horn tripped over fallen teammate Kendall Gill with 22 seconds left in the third quarter and limped off the court, favoring his right knee. But he returned a minute into the fourth quarter.

Again relying on outside jumpers with a sporadic inside presence, the Bucks got 19 points from Ray Allen and 18 from Glenn Robinson in winning their ninth consecutive home opener.

The Bucks are 3-0 under Karl, who replaced Chris Ford over the summer. New Jersey got 17 points from Scott Burrell and 15 from Kerry Kittles.

Knicks 73, Bulls 68

In Chicago, Patrick Ewing scored 18 points, Marcus Camby blocked eight shots and Allan Houston had nine points in the fourth quarter of a sloppy victory over the talent-challenged Bulls.

With no Michael Jordan to break the Knicks in the final quarter as he did so often, the Bulls turned to Toni Kukoc. But after shooting 6-of-21 in his previous game, Kukoc was even worse. He made just 4 of 22 field goal attempts and missed two key shots in the final 1:22, including a key 3-pointer with 36 seconds left.

It was the Knicks' first win at the United Center since April, 1997.

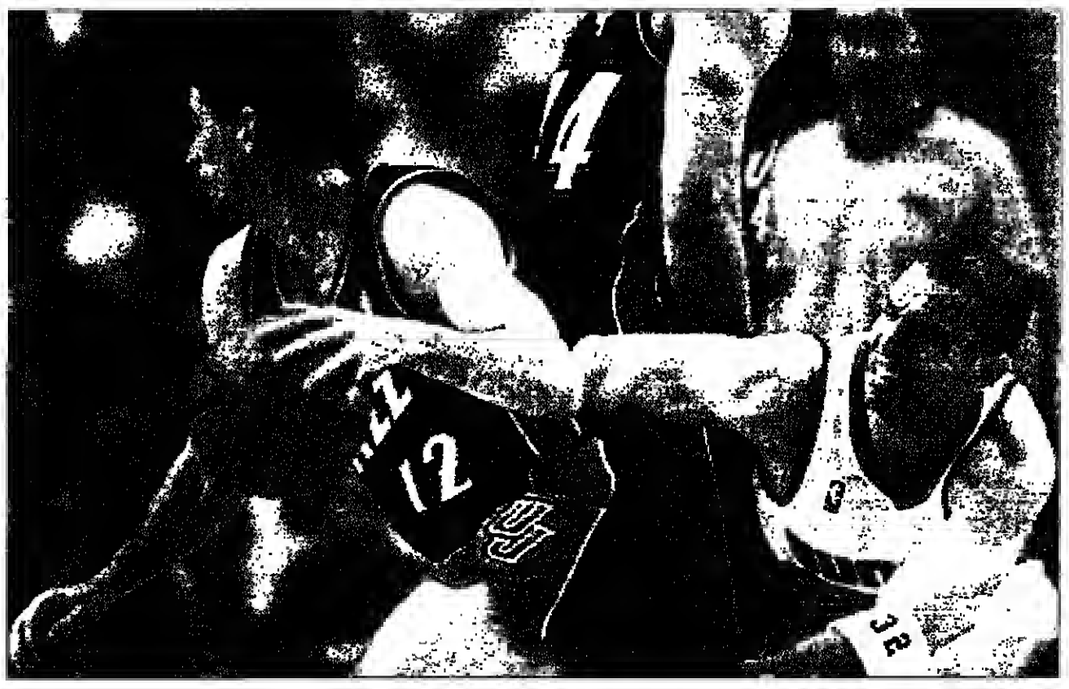
Jazz 82, Suns 74

In Phoenix, Karl Malone had 22 points and nine rebounds Thursday night as Utah improved to 4-0, the best start in its 25-year history.

Tom Gugliotta had 18 points and 11 rebounds for Phoenix but was just 5-for-12 from the field. Jason Kidd was the only other Suns player in double figures with 11 points, but shot only 4-of-14 and had just five assists.

Todd Fuller scored 12 and Jeff Hornacek 11 for the Jazz.

The Suns, who lost their second in a row at home, shot 37 per cent from the field, and only 28 per cent (10-for-36) in the second half.



Phoenix Suns guard Jason Kidd, (32), is screened by Utah Jazz centre Greg Foster while trying to stay with Jazz guard John Stockton, (12), during the first period Feb. 11 (Reuters photo)

Singapore soccer first in Asia to allow local betting on own games

SINGAPORE (AP) — Singapore's national soccer league announced Friday it will become the first in Asia to legalize domestic betting when the season opens March 31.

One reason the practice has been restricted is because of fears it will lead to match-fixing and corruption.

But Singapore officials say that legalizing it will help them control underground gambling and the corrupt payoffs that accompany it.

Singapore Pools, which runs lottery games in the small island republic, will operate the betting on the 132 matches per year played by the Singapore Professional Football League's 12 clubs.

Bets can be made the day before each S-League match, and gamblers have a variety of ways to play the odds, on goals scored, wins or draws, and in a handicapped wager that favours a bet on the weaker team.

When the government gave the go-ahead in July 1997 to legalise soccer gambling, the main reason was to stamp out illegal betting, Minister of Communications Mah Bow Tan said.

Another reason is to channel extra money from the betting into developing the sport.

Asked about the increased chance of corruption from legalising local betting on home games, S-League chief executive Chris Chan said Friday, "We will be as diligent as we can," but if a player wants to throw a game not much can be done but punish him.

Singapore is in the midst of an S-League match-fixing trial, in which the defendant is accused of paying five star players to fix the outcomes of three matches in 1996.

No change in Iraq's bilateral ties with Jordan, Aziz says

BAGHDAD (Agencies) — In its first public reaction to King Hussein's death, Iraq said Thursday that it hopes to "maintain and develop" relations with Jordan under His Majesty King Abdullah.

"First of all, we share [with] the Jordanian people their sorrow for the loss of the late King Hussein," Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz told reporters.

Iraq was represented by Vice President Taha Ma'arouf at King Hussein's funeral on Monday, but the government had until now issued no official statement of condolences. Aziz's comments on Thursday came during an impromptu news conference in the Information Ministry.

The changes in Jordan's leadership, he said, was "an internal matter. We do not interfere in that."

"We respect... [our] relations with Jordan. Those relations are in the best interest of both Jordan and Iraq and we hope to maintain and develop those relations," Aziz said. He had no immediate plans to meet with King Abdullah, he added.

Asked if oil will continue to flow to Jordan, Aziz said: "Certainly, there is no change in our policy toward Jordan."

The Babel newspaper, which is run by President Saddam Hussein's eldest son Uday, said: "Iraq provides a strategic depth for sister Jordan. We will not renounce this truth despite all pressures and under any circumstances."

It said Iraq was a source of "support for the whole of the Arab World, from the Gulf to the [Atlantic] Ocean."

Baghdad will "continue to cooperate with Jordan in line with its vision which consists of putting Arab interests above all other considerations," said the daily.

Turkey rules out change in U.S. Iraq patrols ahead of Aziz visit

ANKARA (R) — Turkey said on Friday it had no intention of revoking its mandate allowing U.S. and British warplanes using a Turkish airbase to patrol northern Iraq, despite Ankara's recent criticism of U.S. policy on Iraq.

"It is a decision made by parliament and only the parliament can change it. The government cannot do anything about it and does not have the intention in any case," Foreign Minister Ismail Cem told reporters.

Parliament was dissolved on Thursday ahead of elections in April. In December, the assembly renewed its permission for the flights for another six months.

Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz, due in Ankara on Monday for a visit which has surprised and irritated Washington, says he will ask Turkey to withdraw its "unfortunate" permission for the patrols, dubbed Operation Northern Watch.

"Turkey is a neighbour and we think neighbours should respect the security and mutual interests of each other," Aziz told reporters in Baghdad on Thursday.

Aziz will try to split Turkey from its NATO allies Britain and the United States over the air patrols, building on Turkish worries the flights could lead to the Kurdish breakaway enclave in northern Iraq becoming a permanent entity, analysts said.

Turkey's defence minister last week called for a revision of the rules of engagement for the planes patrolling the no-fly zone above Iraq's 36th Parallel.

Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit has said Washington has no clear policy on Iraq. But on Friday he said the United States had nothing to fear from Aziz's visit.

"Those who are worried about this meeting will see their concerns are unfounded," he told reporters.

Turkey fears the no-fly zone may lead to the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq which could encourage Kurdish separatism inside its own borders. Ankara says it has lost some $30 billion from the imposition of sanctions on Iraq.

Aziz's visit to Turkey is part of a wider Iraqi diplomatic offensive to win Arab and world support in its standoff with the United States and Britain.

President Saddam Hussein has dispatched Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Sahhaf to Arab and African leaders to try to drum up support for Iraq's defiance of two Western-imposed no-fly zones in north and south of the country.

Sahhaf arrived in Morocco on Thursday to deliver a letter from President Saddam to King Hassan. He has already taken similar letters to Algeria and Tunisia and Baghdad newspapers say he will continue on to other Arab countries.

U.S. fighter jets from the Incirlik base in southern Turkey on Thursday fired on at least five targets in northern Iraq.

The attacks on Iraqi air defence systems have become a regular event since Baghdad announced it did not recognise the zones set up in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War.

This picture released on Dec. 30 by the U.S. Air Force shows an F-16C flying over Iraq in support of Operation Northern Watch (AFP photo)

Iraq says one dead in latest U.S. strike in no-fly zone

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Baghdad stepped up calls Friday for international pressure to end U.S. air raids and warned neighbours of new conflicts as U.S. planes once again bombed Iraq, which said one civilian was killed in the raid.

"Iraq will continue to oppose the aggressions in the north and south, while hoping that the world and the Arabs will fully realise the dangers entailed in the American actions," said Al Thawra, the ruling Baath Party's official paper.

The daily said the international community must act immediately to put pressure on the United States to stop the attacks, "which risk provoking a vicious circle of bloody conflicts throughout the region."

"In standing idly by, the world and Arab countries are adding to the problems and are putting the countries and peoples of the region in danger," the paper warned.

The bombing continued Friday as U.S. planes bombarded sites in the northern no-fly zone in an attack that the official Iraqi News Agency said left one civilian dead and one other wounded.

The agency cited an Iraqi military spokesman as saying that 11 "enemy air formations" flying out of southern Turkey carried out the air strikes.

The United States European Command said only than an F-15 fighter came under fire and responded by dropping one guided bomb on an anti-aircraft artillery site north of the city of Mosul.

On Thursday Baghdad said two civilians died and several were wounded when anti-aircraft sites in the northern provinces of Dohuk and Ninawa were attacked. Several civilians were also hurt in the south-west.

Anti-aircraft fire hit one of the allied warplanes, according to Iraq. Washington denied any planes were damaged.

Al Thawra said that no country nor international organisation believed that the "flight exclusion zones" conformed to international laws and that many countries, including permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, were opposed to U.S. policy on Iraq.

But that was insufficient, the daily said, charging that no pressure had been placed on the United States to end "the flagrant aggressions which have cost human lives and material losses in Iraq."

It deplored the attitude of other Arab countries and urged them to act "in support of Iraqi efforts to counter American aggression, which is endangering the whole region."

Allied patrols of the no-fly zones, which cover more than half of Iraq and are designed to protect Iraq's Kurdish minority in the north and Shiite population in the south, have triggered a series of clashes since the Dec. 16-19 air war to punish Baghdad for failing to comply with U.N. weapons inspections.

A Pentagon spokesman said there have been "more than 90 no-fly zone violations and more than 70 incidents involving Iraqi surface-to-air missiles, anti-aircraft artillery and target tracking radar illuminations against coalition aircraft," since mid-December.

Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz vowed Thursday that Iraq would "continue our struggle against it [no fly zones], no matter what the sacrifices and the consequences."

Russia expresses 'growing concern' over air strikes

MOSCOW (AFP) — Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov expressed on Friday Moscow's "growing concern" at strikes by U.S. and British warplanes patrolling no-fly zones over Iraq. "The repeated air strikes against Iraq by American and British bombers are still going on. These actions not only have serious political consequences but also cause human losses, including civilians, which is absolutely unacceptable," Ivanov said in a statement to Interfax news agency. "The establishment of a no-fly zone is a unilateral act which was not submitted for approval by the United Nations Security Council and is therefore unacceptable," he added.

Sri Lankan maid wins $128,000 for 'slave treatment'

LONDON (AFP) — A Sri Lankan woman who fell three floors trying to escape from a London flat where she was kept as a "domestic slave" by a wealthy Kuwaiti family Friday won 77,988 pounds ($128,000) in damages.

The judge at the High Court in London, said the treatment suffered by Sunrethra Jayasekera, 33, at the hands of her employers, Jaafar and Khaleed Al Sayegh was "almost incredible... in London in the 1990s."

Jayasekera's dawn escape in March 1991 from the ninth-floor flat in central London came after 37 days of working without a single day off, any pay, or a chance to go out.

She was fed on the children's leftovers, made to sleep on their bedroom floor, repeatedly kicked and verbally abused, told she would be taken to Kuwait and threatened with hanging.

"She was in fact treated as a domestic slave," said the judge in his ruling.

Jayasekera, a well-educated woman, came to England in the belief that she was going to supervise Al Sayegh's employment agency, said the judge.

When she first arrived in London, she was taken straight to the flat and told she was to work as a housemaid, the court heard.

She was made to get up at 6 a.m. and spend all day in the kitchen cooking huge meals for the family and their guests before clearing away and getting to bed at 2 a.m.

She also alleged, although it was not pleaded in her statement of claim, that Al Sayegh indecently assaulted her when he woke her in the early hours to take the children to the toilet.

Jayasekera severely damaged her right ankle when she fell during her escape, which happened when a householder, thinking she was a thief, hit her with a broomstick as she climbed down a drainpipe.

The award of 55,000 pounds ($83,000) plus interest for unlawful imprisonment and the resulting physical and psychiatric injuries was made in the Al Sayeghs' absence.

NEWS IN BRIEF

One killed in Egypt bus crash

CAIRO (AP) — One man was killed and 14 other people were injured Friday when a tour bus crashed into a truck on the Red Sea coastal road, the Interior Ministry said. The bus rammed into the rear of the truck about 200 kilometres southeast of Cairo between the towns of Ras Gharib and Za'farana, the ministry said in a statement. Three of the injured were in critical condition in hospital, the statement said. The ministry said the bus driver, Mohammad Sayyed Bashir, 37, was killed and two other Egyptians were injured. The statement did not give the nationalities of the other 12 injured — who were tourists — but said the bus was carrying 12 Russians and five Yugoslavs.

Bomb wounds two children in Lebanon

NABATIYEH (R) — Two children were seriously injured in south Lebanon on Friday when a cluster bomb they had mistaken for a toy exploded, security sources said. They said Mahmoud Hussein and Ahmad Mukaled, both five years old, were hurt by the colourful bomb which they found at a farm in Tuul, west of the southern town of Nabatiyeh. The sources said the cluster bomb, which scatters devices that can later explode like mines, was probably left over from Israel's 1996 incursion into Lebanon.

Mistaken stabber remanded in custody

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — A Palestinian man who wanted to murder a Jew but mistakenly stabbed and killed a Palestinian woman instead was Friday remanded in custody for two weeks, police said. The killer, identified as 23-year-old Mohammad Shaalan of the West Bank town of Abu Dis, has admitted carrying out the killing after giving himself up to the police on finding out that he had killed an Arab. Shaalan only learned the identity of his victim later on the radio and, grief-stricken, surrendered to Israeli police, spokeswoman Linda Menuhin said Thursday. "The suspect told police that he bought a knife in east Jerusalem yesterday and because he was in a critical psychological condition wanted to murder an Israeli," Menuhin said. He then wandered around the Jewish neighbourhood of Musrara near Arab east Jerusalem and when he saw the victim, Naira Qarain, 47, he stabbed her, she said.

Israel, Hizbollah blamed for attacks

BEIRUT (R) — The international group monitoring fighting in south Lebanon said on Friday Israel and Hizbollah guerrillas both violated an agreement designed to protect civilians. The five-nation group, which has been discussing 13 complaints filed by both parties, blamed Hizbollah and Israel for injuring civilians on Feb. 6. The group said in a statement the pro-Iranian guerrillas fired mortar bombs, wounding a woman and a child inside Israel's 15 km deep occupation zone in south Lebanon. The monitors also held Israel and its South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia allies responsible for firing phosphorous rounds that caused serious burns to three children and an adult in Majdel Silm — a village just outside the zone. Two more civilians and 27 houses were also damaged in a second attack.

Afghan quake kills 50

KABUL (R) — Fifty people were killed and 200 injured when a strong earthquake shook Kabul and an area west of the city on Thursday night, Afghanistan's Taleban Radio reported on Friday. "It is with great regret we learn that in last evening's quake 50 people have been killed and 200 wounded," the radio report said, appealing for international aid. It said the deaths occurred in an area some 30 km west of Kabul called Maida Shahr. The radio said it had no reports from other areas. The quake caused several mud-built dwellings in the capital to collapse and panic among some residents who thought they were being attacked by U.S. warplanes or missiles in Washington's search for Saudi militant Osama Ben Laden, who is based in Afghanistan. The radio said a medical team had visited three villages in the affected region and people were "in urgent need of help."

'Brother of Iran's supreme leader assaulted'

TEHRAN (AP) — Hardline vigilantes have assaulted the brother of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, leaving him with a fractured skull, his colleagues and witnesses said Friday.

Shouting "Death to Khatami," the hooligans threw stones, furniture and shoes at Hadi Khamenei on Thursday evening shortly before he was to address a gathering in a mosque in the holy city of Qom, said witnesses and Khamenei's newspaper colleagues.

Moments later the vigilantes beat Khamenei with sticks and iron bars, the witnesses and colleagues added.

Khamenei, who owns a newspaper and serves as a press adviser to President Mohammad Khatami, suffered a broken skull and was rushed to hospital, said his colleagues, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The assault could not be confirmed with the Iranian authorities.

It is third case of hardline Islamists attacking supporters of Khatami in Qom this week, Iranian journalists told the Associated Press.

Earlier, vigilantes assaulted Abbas Abdi, a journalist with the Salam newspaper, and Mohsen Armin, the editor of Asr-e-Ma biweekly, as they spoke at gatherings marking the 20th anniversary of the Islamic revolution, the journalists said.

Abdi and Armin suffered no serious injuries.

In Thursday's incident, Khamenei was about to address a meeting at the Mohammadiyeh Mosque that was called to mark the anniversary and the death of a Shiite Muslim saint, Imam Jafar Sadeq.

Khamenei, 51, owns the liberal-leftist newspaper, World of Islam. His political views are moderate, in contrast to those of his elder brother, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who leads the hardline faction in the Iranian hierarchy.

The hardline faction is engaged in a fierce power struggle with the moderates, who are led by Khatami.

Khamenei's colleagues said the vigilantes tore up pictures of Khatami and broke windows in the mosque.

"The attack was planned and well-coordinated by ruffians known to us," a colleague said.

The attack took place despite the presence of Khamenei's bodyguards, who were also assaulted, said the colleague.

Immediately after the incident, supporters of Khatami came on to the streets and began shouting slogans against hardliners.

"It's either freedom or death," witnesses quoted the pro-moderate protesters as shouting. "Death to opponents of the president! Death to opponents of free thinking!"

Security forces arrested some demonstrators, witnesses said, speaking on condition of anonymity. But this could not be confirmed.

The witnesses said the security forces did not intervene when Khamenei was being attacked.

German FM Fischer meets Arafat amid Israeli anger at EU 'bias'

GAZA CITY (AFP) — German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer met Palestinian President Yasser Arafat here late Thursday, following talks in Jerusalem where senior Israeli officials accused the European Union of being biased in favour of the Palestinians.

Fischer, who is representing the 15-nation EU, said Brussels was dedicated to encouraging all sides to implement the Wye River agreement signed on Oct. 23, under which Israel agreed to turn over more territory to the autonomous Palestinian administration.

"We discussed in an open and friendly way all the problems and our position is quite clear; we are supporting the full implementation of the Wye agreement," said Fischer after his two-and-a-half-hour meeting with Arafat.

Fischer also said that the EU could not put pressure on either the Palestinians or Israel but believed the right course was to encourage dialogue and cooperation between the two sides as a way to reach a compromise.

Arafat for his part noted that the peace accords which the Palestinians signed with Israel were not merely bilateral in character since they were sponsored by the United States and by Russia, which are overseeing the peace process.

Fischer, on a tour of the region, is scheduled Friday to visit refugee camps in the Gaza Strip and the new Gaza international airport.

Earlier in Jerusalem, he met with President Ezer Weizman and then held talks with Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu on his first trip to Israel as Germany's foreign minister.

As he began his talks in Israel, senior Israeli officials expressed renewed anger at the EU for what one top Netanyahu aide called its "systematic" backing of Palestinian positions in the tense peace process.

The Israelis were further angered by European support at the U.N. General Assembly Tuesday in a vote calling signatories of the Geneva Convention to meet later this year to debate Israeli actions in the occupied territories.

"The Europeans systematically vote at the U.N. to woo and please the Palestinians at Israel's expense for motives which are, to say the least, suspicious," said David Bar-Illan, Netanyahu's spokesman.

"It is surprising that the U.N. wants to convene a special conference for the first time in 50 years [over the occupied territories] when it did not do this over wars and genocide like in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia," he said.

Israel announced Wednesday that it would boycott the Geneva Convention meeting, saying its aims were "political and not humanitarian."

Israel was also infuriated by a statement issued by the EU last month saying it "deplored" Israel's refusal to carry out further West Bank withdrawals and other steps called for under the U.S.-brokered Wye River peace accord with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu froze implementation of the land-for-security agreement in December, citing what he said were Palestinian violations of the deal.

The EU has also suspended Israel's participation in a multi-billion dollar research and development programme in a decision Netanyahu's government charged was political.

"Europe has a totally biased attitude because they know that in imposing sanctions on us they risk nothing while if they vote against the Arabs with their dictatorial governments they leave themselves open to a boycott," Bar-Illan said.

Israeli ultra-Orthodox prepare for battle with supreme court

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israel's ultra-Orthodox Jewish community was Friday preparing for battle ahead of a mass rally in Jerusalem to protest against the Israeli supreme court while secular Jews were organising their own counter-demonstration.

Ultra-Orthodox rabbis have called on hundreds of thousands of their followers, including women and children, to take to the streets to demonstrate against the supreme court which has infuriated them with rulings in favour of religious pluralism.

This is the first time that the ultra-Orthodox have decided to confront the judiciary so openly, calling on the Jewish religious tradition or halakha, which is mediated by the rabbis, to contest the rule of law represented by the judges.

"We cannot tolerate the right of the supreme court to trespass on purely religious issues, concerning the relationship between man and God," senior ultra-Orthodox leader and former Minister Menachem Porush told Israeli Radio.

In a rare act of cohesion, ultra-Orthodox rabbis from all sects have agreed to call on their followers to come to the rally.

In addition religious settlers from the extreme right, who have their own score to settle with the supreme court because of what they say are its ruling against settlement of the Palestinian territories, have said that they will join in Sunday's rally.

Meanwhile, militant secular groups, smaller in number but as determined as their ultra-Orthodox foes, have invited Israelis to defend the supreme court as a "bulwark of democracy" and, in a poster campaign, have declared that "Israel will not become the new Iran."

The ultra-Orthodox, who form between 7 per cent to 10 per cent of the Jewish population of Israel, have been incensed by rulings handed down by supreme court which have removed the monopoly of the Orthodox rabbinate to conduct conversions to Judaism and over other aspects of religious life in Israel.

The haredim or ultra-Orthodox claim that they have been the victims of a "hate campaign" by the secular majority and by the press.

Rabbi Ovadia Yossef, the spiritual leader of the ultra-Orthodox Shas Party which represents mainly Sephardis of oriental origin and which is the third largest group in the Knesset, on Tuesday called the judges of the supreme court "wicked and ignorant."

"The court was forced to intervene if the separation between religion and the state was to remain in place," countered political scientist Yaron Ezrahi.

"The basis of the problem is that the ultra-Orthodox want to impose their conception of the halakha on the majority, secular or religious, in contravention of the principle of democracy," said the professor of political science at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

"The haredim are mobilising against the supreme court because it is the only body which stands up to them," said another political analyst, Ilana Greilsammer.